

SERMONS

BY

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IN THE

UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS.

PUBLISHED FROM THE AUTHOR'S MANUSCRIPT

By GEORGE HILL, D. D.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE Sermons which I now present to the Public, appear under peculiar disadvantages. One of them was composed about twenty years ago: all the rest at a much more remote period. It does not appear that the Author intended any of them for publication: The state in which he left his papers, did not clearly shew which of his Sermons he judged the best; and the merit of many of them was so nearly equal, that out of the number put into my hands, I found it difficult to make a selection.

In performing the task which I undertook, I have made such corrections upon the style as my respectable friend would probably have adopted, if he had revised his own works for the press: I have sometimes omitted sentences or short paragraphs, which appeared to me a repetition of what was elsewhere
better

better expressed; and in one or two instances, I have made a small alteration upon the division and arrangement of a discourse. But I have been scrupulously careful to preserve the character of the Author's composition; and I entertain no doubt that those who recollect his public appearances, will find in these Sermons an exact picture of the peculiarities of his style and manner.

The best account of the Author, with which I can furnish the Public, is contained in a few sentences, which, on the 12th of June 1791, I addressed to the Congregation, in the charge of which I had succeeded him, and to which he had ministered twenty-two years before he was placed in St Mary's College.

“ A few days ago we laid in the dust, a venerable man, an able minister of the New Testament, of whose labours in the gospel it was the privilege of this Congregation long to reap the benefit; and whose mouth distilled words of comfort, instruction,
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and persuasion, the salutary impression of which, many, I trust, who hear me, will never lose. Such of us as saw the vigour of his days, remember the delight with which we hung upon his lips; the grace of his elocution; the interesting, devotional, pathetic style of his discourses. We have often felt the effect which the combined power of his voice, his action, and his matter produced on the minds of his hearers; we were accustomed to admire the elegance and judgment with which, in a few well chosen sentences, he expressed what some special occasion required: we have witnessed the ardour with which, at solemn seasons, his soul seemed to glow; and while he spake, the fire has burned within us.

“ Many of us had frequent occasion of observing the soundness of his understanding in the conduct of business; and all of us knew that, in the private intercourse of life, he was gentle and amiable. Although little disposed to obtrude himself in conversation, he contributed to the cheerfulness and good humour

humour of every company, both by his polished address, and by the happy art of introducing, in the most pleasing manner, something suited to the time, the place, and the persons. His long experience in the management of affairs, led him to disapprove of rash and violent measures; and he was always a counsellor of peace. Yet he was ever ready to make allowance for those who did not listen to the counsels which he mildly suggested. Forbearing, fair, and candid, he never failed to put the best construction upon the motives and actions of all around him; he studied to gain his brother by kindness; and he knew how to turn away wrath by a soft answer.

“ The world can ill spare spirits such as his. The acrimony and keenness with which many pursue their objects, have need of such sweeteners; and we who are left to bustle in scenes from which he is removed, will often regret the absence of that grace and dignity of character, that prudence free from guile,
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and those placid winning manners by which our departed friend was admirably fitted to moderate the passions of others, and to preserve the peace of society.^s

The Congregation to whom I spake these words will prize this volume as a memorial of one whom they loved and admired; and I flatter myself it will be read with pleasure and advantage by many also to whom he was personally unknown. It is, in my opinion, most desirable that sermons of all different kinds should be offered to the public. The varieties of taste, of sentiment, and of situation in those who are accustomed to seek that consolation and instruction which sermons afford, require a corresponding variety in this popular species of composition. What one class of readers peruse without interest, may meet the wishes and the needs of another; and unless when there is manifest absurdity upon the part of the author, or some gross perversion in his writings of the great design of the gospel,

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the candid and enlightened will always be ready to entertain the pleasing hope that every such publication may become a valuable accession to the stores of Sacred Literature, by being useful to some of their fellow Christians.

GEO. HILL.

ST MARY'S COLLEGE, }
August 5, 1796. }

SERMON I.

ON THE LOVE OF GOD.

IN TWO PARTS.

MAT. XXII. 37, 38.

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment.

THERE is here a striking display of the wisdom of Jesus. We owe it to the malice of his enemies. They combine against him, seeking to intangle him in his talk; but all their attempts are frustrated, and they are taken in their own snare. The Herodians cannot entrap him in one disloyal expression, the Sadducees cannot puzzle him upon the deep subject of a resurrection; nor can the Scribes and Pharisees gravel him with the nicest points of their law—The justness and propriety of his answers baffled all their art, and overpowered them with confusion. We read that they were astonished at his doctrine, that they marvelled and left him and went their way.

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The Pharisees alone venture upon a second attack, ver. 35. One of them who was a lawyer, the fittest, it is likely, for subtle disputation, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, Which is the great commandment in the law? It would seem this was an important point of controversy, and at that time differently resolved; some preferring one commandment, some another, and all making the great commandment swallow up the rest: a noble device for abridging the matter of duty, and rendering the law of God, as to the greatest part, of none effect. In return to the question, our Lord espouses not the opinion of any of the litigant parties, preferring sacrifice, circumcision, phylacteries, or the like; but condescends on two precepts of the law distinguished by their own importance, and so comprehensive as to include both the tables of it. ver. 37—40. The answer carries in it a just reproof of their unedifying strife; overturns from the bottom their narrow partial notions of religion; and establishes this great maxim of the gospel, That one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law. The first part of our Saviour's answer, This first and great commandment of the law, is intended as the subject of the following Discourse. Here is true religion opened up before us in its source and spring. Amongst the other commands of God and our other duties, the precedence is fixed where it ought to be.

In

In treating of this important point, I propose

1st. To attempt a short explication of the love of God.

2dly. To enquire into the meaning of those circumstances of this love prescribed in the commandment, and here remembered by Jesus, With all thy heart and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

3dly. To make some observations serving to illustrate the eminence of this commandment, declared in these words, This is the first and great commandment.

4thly. In fine, to subjoin an improvement of the whole.

The first thing proposed is to attempt an explication of the love of God. And in general it may be defined, An habitual prevailing regard to the Deity, founded in the knowledge of him, including an high esteem of his excellencies, a grateful sense of his goodness, and an ardent desire after the enjoyment of him; producing withal, wherever it is real, a studious imitation of his amiable perfections, and an earnest endeavour to please him.

It may contribute to our comprehending more clearly the import and meaning of this leading precept, if we dwell a little on the several parts of this description.

1st. Then, The Love of God here commanded supposes the knowledge of him, and begins in it.

No man hath seen God at any time; and the full knowledge of him never was, and never will be the attainment of a finite imperfect mind. Who can find out the Almighty to perfection? But after this is allowed, still there must be knowledge, otherwise there could be no affection. Our notions of God ought to be just, though it is impossible they should be perfect and adequate.

He who gave this commandment hath not left us without the means of knowing himself.

His works over our heads, around us, and beneath us, carry upon them the lively characters of their Creator, and manifest the invisible things of God.

The conduct of a providence traced in the history of what is past, and observed in what is now going on, admits us into a closer acquaintance with the supreme governour.

The amiable qualities scattered among the children of men, though blended in them with much weakness and folly, help us to lively conceptions of that Being from whom flows all that is lovely among the creatures.

The scriptures, given by immediate inspiration, furnish still more light: These are they that testify of him.

The most lively exhibition of himself with which the world has ever been favoured, is the life of Jesus, who dwelt among men full of grace and truth. This

was God himself only covered with a veil of flesh; The express image of the Father's person. In him all his glory is made to pass before us. In the use of these means, by careful study of the book of nature and the book of Revelation, we are to acquaint ourselves with God, to have the understanding informed and enlightened that the heart may be engaged. It is not enough that we seek the Lord, if happily we may feel after him and find him, as the Nations are said to have done; or that like the Athenians, we have our altars with this inscription, To the unknown God. More is required in our case, than a groping after God, or a superstitious blind regard. Of us may justly be expected a measure of knowledge suiting our opportunities. Concerning which allow me to observe, in passing, that our proficiency in this knowledge will be found to depend more on the probity of the heart than the penetration of the head, more on the divine grace sanctifying and illuminating the soul, than on natural abilities or acquired improvements. All love that is rational and acceptable must be built on knowledge, and proceed from it. Accordingly, the word in the text rendered mind, signifies the understanding; and the scribe who had the precept from the mouth of our Saviour gives this interpretation of the word, when he repeats the precept in the gospel of Mark, xii. 33.

2ndly,

2dly. The love of God includes in it an high esteem of his perfections and excellencies.

To love with the mind or understanding signifies not barely to perceive and know, but knowing also to approve and admire. To love God without a distinct knowledge of his amiable perfections is to love we know not what: To love him without an high estimation of these, is to love him we know not why; a blind irrational attachment which cannot be acceptable to him who is glorious in holiness. Charity, the name often given to love, signifies, when the import of it is considered, the value we put upon a person and his virtues, by which he becomes dear to us: and the love of God, that great charity, which is the end of this commandment, signifies the price, in our account, put upon his perfections, by which he is precious to our soul. Love separated from such an estimation, can hardly please the most worthless of our fellow creatures, and how should it please the great Creator, who is blessed for evermore? Esteem is that part of love which is disinterested. We cannot withhold it from worthy characters, however remote from us in time and place, concerning whom we have only read in history, or but heard by the report of fame: and is this tribute to be withheld from God, to whom it is eminently due, and who is not far from every one of us?

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The knowledge of the Deity, where it is distinct and clear, naturally and almost necessarily produces esteem---Consult his works, The Word or the Son, who came forth to reveal him. These with one voice tell us, that he is infinitely perfect; that in him there is all fulness of all that is excellent. He is light, and in him is no darkness at all. God is love. The scattered excellencies which we admire in his creatures, are only emanations from this inexhausted fountain of bliss. Their derived graces are the shadows of his goodness. The sons of the mighty may not be compared with him. There is none good but one. He is the chief good, possessing in himself all that can make a whole creation happy. Do not these characters command esteem? That they fill us not with higher and juster sentiments of admiration, is owing to our imperfection and want of spiritual discernment. How do they now strike the angels of heaven and the thousands that are around the throne! How will they hereafter strike the saints when their spirits are made perfect!

3dly. The Love of God includes gratitude.

Esteem naturally leads to gratitude where the object of it is a benefactor. We admire the character of the great and good men of former times, and in this we rest: They are nothing to us and we are nothing to them. But from adoring God and his divine attributes, we are led to consider him as

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our creator, preserver, and redeemer. Short of this we cannot stop; and this awakens in the soul the affection of gratitude; a livelier affection, which knits the heart closer to him by another, a pleasing and voluntary tie. Esteem is the regard we pay to the perfections of the Deity, considered absolutely, when our interest in them is not attended to. This is followed and heightened by a lively gratitude, when his perfections are viewed relatively, as exerted for our happiness. Esteem regards God as infinitely good in himself, gratitude regards him as good to us and ever doing us good. Esteem fixes the eye upon his excellence, gratitude looks further to his beneficence, and sees the greatest, to be also the best and kindest of Beings. The great commandment calls for the latter, as well as the former. It will have us to view God and love him as a Being in whom we have a special interest; with a love of gratitude. Thou shalt love the Lord *thy* God.

With how many talents fitting us for usefulness and happiness has he endowed us! How many favours have we received immediately from his hand, or from the hand of friends whom he hath raised up! From how many dangers have our heads been covered by his interposition! How infinitely are we indebted for spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus! He hath waited with forbearance for our repentance. Much has been given, much forgiven:
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What do we owe him for his checks, and restraints, and strivings of his spirit, by which we have been prevented from running headlong into perdition? What for the life, and health, and peace, diffused through the soul by the Holy Ghost in the times of refreshing! All these favours derive a high value from the hand which munificently bestows them. Besides the felicity immediately imparted by them, they elate the mind with joyous hope, they are earnest of good things to come. They are the pledges, I say not of what, of what eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man to conceive. The happy prefages of futurity are sources of joy unspeakable. Goodness and mercy shall follow me all my days, and I shall dwell in the house of God for ever. These and the like are grounds and incentives of gratitude. How must the soul be touched upon such recollection of the past, and anticipation of the future; all its affections are engaged: almost the very senses feel it; and the breathings of love are "What shall we render to the Lord, O taste and see that the Lord is good!"

4thly, From esteem and gratitude love proceeds to chuse and desire God as the portion of the soul.

Finding the world unkind and unsatisfying, the creatures empty and fading, the soul aspires after the enjoyment of God, and fixes upon him as the

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supreme good. I mean not that all who love God desire such communications as have been granted to prophets and apostles, and other great names, commissioned to execute the higher purposes of providence for the benefit of mankind. These, like the ends of them, are extraordinary and uncommon. But there is a communion with God promised in scripture, and indulged to good men, which they cannot think of being without. Mat. v. 8. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. John xiv. 21. He that loveth me shall be loved of my father, and I will love him and will manifest myself to him. James iv. 8. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Such fellowship with God there is room to hope for. Without this the earth and its fulness cannot satisfy them that love him. It is their constant care by purity of heart to be qualified for it, and their constant desire to attain it. While many say who will shew us any good, the language of love is, Psalm iv. 6. Lord lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon me: lxxii. 25. Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.

Now, as all desire operates differently, according as the object of it is distant, or near, or present, so it happens here.

When, for our sins, God has hid his face, or withdrawn from us, for our trial, the mind is restless.

less and uneasy. In this season of desertion, outward enjoyments are tasteless; every sweet thing is bitter; the sun shineth not; the stars are not clear. The impatience of love is in scripture defined longing, thirsting, panting, fainting for God, the living God. On the cross it is painted in a manner that exceeds description, Mark xvi. 24. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me." This, at the ninth hour, cried Jesus, with a loud voice.

When, at a happier season, he arises upon the soul with healing in his wings, and makes his countenance to shine, impatience is turned into delight. The soul is satisfied, as with marrow and fatness, nothing is wanted but more exalted affections, and more enlarged capacities of happiness. Blessed is the man whom thou chusest, and causest to approach unto thee.

In fine, when God is present, desire is at rest, in the possession of its great object. Love is perfected. This is not the privilege of a present state of imperfection; It is only to be looked for above, in the happy regions of light and love. In the presence of God there is fulness of joy; at his right hand there are pleasures evermore. The highest communications which God vouchsafes to any here, are only partial: they rather whet and encrease, than satiate the desires of the soul. Love here rises not above an ardent desire, such as is express-

ed, Phil. i. 23. "I have a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better."

5thly, In fine, the love of God, founded in knowledge, comprehending esteem, gratitude, and choice, discovers itself in an ardent desire to resemble him, and a sincere endeavour to walk so as to please him.

1. An ardent desire to resemble God, is essential to love. There is an assimilating power in love. Lovers are seen to slide into a resemblance of one another, in things often by no means commendable; and love to God has a transforming influence. He who admires the divine goodness, mercy, faithfulness, and truth, cannot tolerate in himself, the opposite qualities, which render him unlike, and odious to the best of Beings. He cannot but seek to have these excellencies which he esteems in God, transplanted into his own soul. What endears to him the gospel institution, more than signs and miracles wrought when it was first published, is that power which still remains with it, of creating men, after the image of God, thus expressed, 2 Cor. iii. 19. But we all with open face, beholding as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord. What chiefly quickens his desire of heaven is, that there the love of God, and the likeness of God together, shall

shall be compleated. I find not in scripture, a more lively breathing of love, than in the words of pious David, Psalm xvii. 15. As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness, I shall be satisfied when I awake, with thy likeness.

2. There is likewise inseparable from love to God, a sincere endeavour to walk, so as to please him. Every thing dishonouring to the person we love, touches us, as an injury done to ourselves. The soul that loves God, is galled with the offences committed against him. There is not, perhaps, a more certain test, or measure of love, than the resentment felt in such cases, Psalm cxxxix. 21. Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee, and am I not grieved with them that rise up against thee? And what can so little be endured in others, will much less be tolerated in our own practice. It were a strange kind of love, and not to be distinguished from hatred, that could consist with any allowed course of wilful sin. They that love the Lord will hate evil.

This holy affection is always accompanied with a jealousy of ourselves. It is sharp-sighted in discerning what is wrong, and prone to reformation: and it produces an ambition to please the Being whom we love, zeal, and alacrity, in doing what is acceptable to him. He condescends to declare that he will be pleased with a virtuous and holy

ly life. The righteous Lord loveth righteousness. He hath written the rules of life on the tables of our heart, and he hath extended them in the precepts of his word. Where love is real, there needs no more. Love to the Lawgiver will make the law agreeable. O Lord, how love I thy law, Ps. xix. 8. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. 9. The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea than much fine gold, sweeter also than honey and the honey-comb.—The feelings of a genuine love we find expressed in the words of the apostle, 2 Cor. v. 14. For the love of God constraineth us. The language of a perfect love hear from the lips of Jesus, John iv. 84. My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.—The love of God and keeping the commandments, are found together in scripture, like cause and effect. Ex. xx. 6. Shewing mercy to thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments.—In our Lord's discourses upon this subject, John xiv. 20. He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me. Ver. 23. If a man love me he will keep my words.—In the epistles of the beloved disciple who leaned on the bosom of his master, who had imbibed his pure sentiments, and learned of him to discourse of love, 1 John v. 3. This is the love of God that we keep his commandments.

ments, and his commandments are not grievous.
2 John v. 6. This is love that we walk after his
commandments. This great commandment enjoin-
ing love means effectually to secure obedience. It
bespeaks the inward principle, that it may not fail
of engaging the outward conduct. It will have the
heart and life to go together. 1 John ii. 5. Whoso
keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God
perfected.

The love of God, according to this account of it,
is vindicated from the charge of enthusiasm; for
Here is nothing more obviously consonant to the
dictates of sound reason than that the soul with its
affections should go out after God, and that man
should live devoted to the Supreme Being.

From this account we may learn to correct cer-
tain fatal mistakes in this matter which are not un-
common.

Some people naturally self confident presume, from
an occasional flow of spirits while they meditate of
God or worship him, that they really love him. A
tide of good humour easily passes for an overflowing
of love.

Others with no better reason sink under disquiet-
ing fears and doubts. They are without the fer-
vours of passion, and therefore dread that they
want the reality of love. A sedate frame not easy

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to be elated, they misinterpret as an evidence of coldness and indifference.

On both sides they err. The question concerning our love to God must not rest wholly or chiefly on inward feelings and impressions; but regard must also be had to the life and conduct.—The Psalmist of old experienced the liveliest transports, and could not be mistaken about his love. A few of a mind happily enlarged for devotion, feel in the same manner. Their heart or their flesh cry out for the living God. But this is far from being the case of all who love our Lord Jesus in sincerity and truth. If, together with a mind devoted to him, we find an humble earnest care to imitate and please God, then we may assure our hearts before him.—It is by no means easy to judge when we have formed such lovely ideas of God as are proper, or when our longings after him have reached the degree of ardour that is requisite: but it is not so difficult to determine when our endeavours to serve and resemble him are honest and sincere. Here an upright mind cannot well be deceived, and the spirit will guide us into truth.

PART SECOND.

HAVING thus attempted to explain the Love of God, I proceed,

II. To enquire into the meaning of the circumstances of it prescribed in the commandment, and here remembered by Jesus, With all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.—Deut. vi. 5. we read, *With all thy might*, in place of “with all thy mind,” and to the enumeration here made, we find added, in the other Evangelists, Mark, xii. 30. Luke, x. 27. *and with all thy strength*.

There occurs a doubt, whether so many words used in this great commandment, and carefully kept in it, when it is cited by our Lord, are intended to convey each a precise and distinct meaning; Or, if this variety of expression is designed, more to enforce than explain the duty, and chiefly to give a weight and emphasis to the matter enjoined. Without labouring an accurate solution of this difficulty, I shall mention, shortly, certain circumstances essential to the love of God, suggested, if not, as I think, also intended in the commandment.

1st. Our love to God must be sincere and unfeigned, in opposition to an affected devotion, such as that of the Israelites, reproved in the

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Prophet Isaiah, xxix. 13. This people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me.—A regard that is pretended, will pass current with men no longer than we are able to cover from them its shallowness. And how should it be accepted of him who knows the secrets of all hearts.—It is his just and reasonable demand upon us, Prov. xxiii. 26. My son give me thine heart. The same is plainly the spirit of the commandment before us. It speaks to the heart. It makes sure not to be mistaken, using all the different names, heart, and soul, and mind. It lays the obligation evidently, and with the utmost strictness, upon the inner man. It is strange that any should have contended that obedience to the precepts of God is the whole of the love here required. If it were possible to keep all the ordinances and statutes of the Lord blameless, without loving him, we should offer a vain oblation. All duty owes its value to love, and the strictest performances are nothing without it. The first and great commandment requires us, not only to do what God commands, but to do it, because he commands, from an inward, hearty affection, influencing the behaviour in public and in secret.

2. It is required that our love to God be supreme and entire, With all thy heart, with all thy soul, and

and with all thy mind, that is, with all that is within thee. From the manner of expression, some have pleaded for a love to God engrossing the whole man, and excluding every degree of affection to any object beside. But this is at once unreasonable and unintelligible.—From what is amiable in good men, who bear his image, we gather our ideas of his perfect excellencies. By loving them we learn to love him. 1 John iv. 20. He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen. A certain degree of love to them is necessary in order to our loving him, and it is not excluded. The commandment joined to this, and said to be like it, enjoins us to love our neighbour, and permits us to love ourselves, v. 39. The only consistent meaning, then, which can be put upon these words, With all, &c. is, that our love to God, though it admit of subordinate regards to the creatures, must yet rule over them, and set bounds to them. It must be the supreme and reigning affection. It must exclude love to sin, which is enmity against God. It must exclude love to the world, which is incompatible with love to him. 1 John ii. 15. It must, in fine, exclude all rival affections, as we are taught by our Saviour, Matt. x. 37. He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me; and

he that taketh not his cross and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.—True it is, and much to be lamented, that we shall always experience other and undue attachments, while we converse with flesh and blood. These will prove and try the reality and strength of our love to God. This last shall not reach its full maturity, and come up to the perfect standard, till it cast them all out, and the kingdom within is delivered up to the Father. Meanwhile the question which Jesus after his resurrection put to Peter, John xxi. 25. *Simon son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?* is the great searching question with us all. Other affections may have their place, and by means of these, other objects have their interest within us. But the decisive query is, *Lovest thou me more than these.* Where love to God maintains a just sway, and sits at the helm, we may have confidence before him, and reply with Simon, Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee.

3dly, It is required, that our love to God be vigorous, and active, and ardent, in opposition to every degree of coldness and indifference. There is no character mentioned by the spirit of God in terms of greater aversion than that of the Laodiceans, Rev. iii. 14---16. *I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot; So then because thou art lukewarm,*
and

and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. This defect of zeal and spirit is guarded against in the terms here used, "With the heart, soul, and mind." These apply not where there is an insipid languor and dulness. The terms found in the commandment, as it stands in the pentateuch, and in the other evangelists. *Might and strength* import much sprightliness and alacrity; they require that we be thoroughly roused and wholly engaged. "Might and strength," respect not only the vigour of the inward affection and its prevalence over all sinful interfering passions: But they evidently regard the efforts of it in life. Its expressions and fruits in the outward conduct; the walking in love, imitating and serving him; doing what he commands with our might, and heartily, as unto the Lord; delighting greatly in his law, and quitting ourselves like men. These terms require that, as the Apostle expresses it, Eph. iii. 17. We be rooted and grounded in love. They require a fidelity of love, and that when it is tried by temptation, it be found unto praise and honour. They especially respect these labours and travels of love, which go farther than every thing else to prove a good man's sincerity.

4thly, It is required, in fine, that our love to God be equal and permanent. Not fickle and inconstant, like that of Ephraim and Judah, in the Lamentation of the Prophet Hof. vi. 4. O Ephraim what shall I do
unto

unto thee, O Judah what shall I do unto thee; for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away. A love that is inconstant, rising high, and sinking low, ebbing and flowing, may be proportioned to mortal creatures, and empty sublunary things; but can never suit the great object here propounded to our entire affection, God who is blessed for ever, the same to day, yesterday and for ever, without variableness or shadow of turning.—An occasional love of this sort answers not to the great commandment, which speaks to us, not now and then, but at all times. It is not a love fit; a transport of devotion; but a pious habit, a devout frame, a steady constant affection toward God, that is required. We may not indeed be able always to reach the fervours of love, which are excited at certain happier seasons; when he surprises us with great and unexpected favours, when he causes all his goodness to pass before us, and by a secret virtue of his Holy Spirit, makes our heart to burn within us. But there must be an habitual bias of the soul, which always gives God the preference, and a cleaving to the Lord with purpose of heart. The love required, is such as that defined in the words of Solomon's Song, viii. 7. Strong as death, which many waters cannot quench, neither can the floods drown it. It is required that this love have as few interruptions as the present imperfect state

state will permit, and that it know no term short of the end of life, as St Jude exhorts, v. 21. Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, unto eternal life.

Having thus attempted to explain the love of God and the circumstances of it enjoined, I go on

III. To make some observations, serving to illustrate the peculiar eminence of this commandment, declared in these words. This is the first and great commandment.

I. This is properly denominated the first and great commandment, because it is the foundation of practical religion, from which all the other duties of it derive their obligation.—Acts of justice, charity, and mercy; the exercises of meekness, sobriety, and temperance, are evidently suited to our frame and condition, and tend to the prosperity of societies, and the happiness of individuals. The practice of them is therefore proper and reasonable. But it is God commanding them that lays the strict obligation upon us, the subjects of his moral government. It is not their own fitness, or the tendency of them, but the authority of the great lawgiver in them, which binds and engages the conscience. This commandment, then, pointing out the regard due to the supreme lawgiver, and the measure of it, is at the bottom of all. The whole superstructure is built upon this. It holds

holds a priority, as it were, in nature : It claims a precedency to all other laws. This is the first and great commandment.

2dly, This is distinguished above the other commandments, not only because it gives them a power to oblige, but because it powerfully determines us to obey them.

It is the property of love, that it declines nothing, and reckons nothing grievous, whereby we may recommend ourselves to the person beloved. This holds, when it terminates on some imperfect creature. How much more when it centres upon the supreme Being, where judgment and reason approve the well placed affection, and concur with it. God by his promise to the Israelites, Deut. xxx. 6. 8. intimated, that where the heart is circumcised to love him, his commandments will be obeyed.

Where this love is, God will be worshipped in spirit and truth. His tabernacles will be amiable, and his dwelling place lovely. His day will be hallowed, and his sabbath a delight. His ordinances will be observed ; the soul will keep them with care. The duties of the second table will not be omitted. He that loveth God, will love his brother also, 1 John v. 1. He that loves God, will seek to know his statutes and judgments, and to do them.—Fear binds up one from evil for a season, and then, how soon the danger is over, leaves him
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the same as before. But the influence of love is more effectual and permanent. It changes the whole bent and inclination of the mind: It urges; it constrains; it brings every imagination into captivity to the law of Christ. Where it is strong, difficulties, however great and continued, only whet the resolution, Gen xxix. 20. When Jacob had served for Rachel his seven years, they seemed to him only a few days, for the love he bore her. It inspires a noble fidelity and invincible zeal, and leads even to suffer patiently when this is the will of God, Acts v. 41. The apostles of Jesus, from this motive rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. Considering then the powerful influence of this love, that it facilitates what is hard, conquers all reluctance, surmounts every obstacle, and renders duty delightful, we see how fitly it is styled "the first and great commandment."

3dly, It is so, because love to God renders our obedience to his other commandments acceptable to him.

It is not with good offices one is pleased, so much as with the friendly intention of the person who does them. Every thing one does or attempts, from a hearty attachment, is taken in good part; his omissions are overlooked; his errors are pardonable mistakes; and his faults are only failings. Now all this holds with respect to God. If the motive of a man, who seems to be religious, is to

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please men, or promote any worldly sinister end, verily he has his reward. But the incense which he burns, is in the sight of God, as if he blessed an idol. The only return he can expect of his fastings, and prayers, and alms, and services, is in these words, "have ye at all done this unto me." Whereas, on the other hand, the upright, though weak endeavours of one who loves God, will never fail of being accepted. If the disadvantages of his lot, and unfavourable circumstances, hinder him from doing much to advance the glory of God among men, the most gracious allowances will be made, and the little he hath done received, 2 Cor. viii. 12. If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not. The breathings of love, which for want of opportunity, have never issued from the heart, are seen in secret, and will be rewarded openly. His love commends him to the divine compassion, when he fails and offends, as all must do. This charity covers a multitude of sins. Read that melting description of the divine mercy, Psal. ciii. 11.—14. and you must infer, that as the mercy of our heavenly Father is great toward them that fear him, much more it is great toward them that love him; more certainly he knoweth their frame, remembereth they are dust, pitieth them, and removeth their transgression from them.

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The service performed upon other principles, accounted the noblest and best, is only acceptable, in so far as love has co-operated with them. The duty, for instance, done out of fear, if this be not filial and mixed with love, is servile and slavish. The obedience which is animated by hope, would be too selfish and interested to please, if hope, which looks for the enjoyment of God, did not imply, at the same time, the love of him. It is the glory of faith, the grace so highly extolled, and so great in power, the victory which overcometh the world, that it worketh by love, that is, proceedeth from love to God, as well as produceth love to the brethren. The duties of the christian life are, in scripture, indiscriminately called the work of faith, and the labour of love. Among the other duties of the christian life, love is the great head, from whence nourishment, life, and spirit, are ministered unto all the rest, to the edifying of the body. Every sacrifice salted with this salt, every offering burned with this flame, is acceptable, and of a sweet smelling favour unto God. This law, commanding love, which not only engages our obedience, but also consecrates and hallows it, is the first and great commandment.

4thly, In fine, what further still distinguishes this commandment is, that the obedience of it contributes, in an eminent degree, to our improvement

and happiness. Such is the nature of the human mind, that it adapts itself to the objects with which it is familiar. Nothing can be of greater detriment, than the misplacing our affections; and nothing tends more to our advantage, than that they be properly directed. We can never say enough of the utility, as well as fitness of fixing them ultimately upon God. From loving and delighting in God, we come to resemble him. The soul in which he dwells by love, is ennobled by this inhabitation. It derives from him a dignity and glory. It is transfigured and changed, as Moses was, imperceptibly, on the mount. "He wist not that his face shone, while he talked with him," *Exod. xxxiv. 29.* The godly is in truth more excellent than his neighbour.

But this love, besides ennobling the soul, is likewise the source of much felicity. The supreme excellence, in which we are thus interested, gives ineffable satisfaction. *Song v. 10.* What is thy beloved more than another beloved: He is the chiefest among ten thousand, yea, he is altogether lovely. Reflection on the wise choice made, is in this case, a perpetual feast, and yields much sweet complacency. The kind returns of his love to the soul, how enchanting! *Song ii. 16.—3.* My beloved is mine, and I am his, I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.

taste. In keeping of his commandments, where they are kept from love, there is a great reward. He that loves him with all the heart, is a sharer of his infinite happiness; receives a pleasure from the praises and services which men and angels render him; and tastes the joy of heaven. Temporal blessings are given, and have an uncommon sweetness, as here they are pledges of love, and earnest of better things.' Psal. cxlv. 20. The Lord preserveth all them that love him. Prov. viii. 17. I love them that love me. ver. 21. I cause those that love me to inherit substance.

If bread and water are all their portion here, the bread of affliction and the waters of Marah, yet spiritual blessings fail not to be imparted; and their reversionary final good is secure. While evils oppress them, the consolations of God impart a felicity independent on the gifts of fortune and the caprice of men, which strangers intermeddle not with. Jo. xiv. 21. He that loveth me shall be loved of my father, and I will love him and will manifest myself to him. Ver. 23. If a man love me he will keep my words, and my father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him. We know that all things work together for good to them that love God. All things are theirs, not only things present, but things to come. 1 Cor. ii. 9. Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither

ther hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive the good things which God hath prepared for them that love him. Heaven is, in scripture, The kingdom which God hath promised to them that love him. There love is perfected and happiness consummated! 1 Jo. iv. 15. God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

Thus, having finished what concerns the import and eminence of this great commandment; it only remains

IV. That I subjoin a few inferences from the whole, in the way of improvement.

1. From this text and the verse following, which together contain a summary of practical religion, you learn what it is, and you see that it is always, and every where the same--To love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and to love thy neighbour as thyself. These are a summary of the law of Sinai, and comprehend the substance of all the moral precepts given to men from the day they were created on the face of the earth till the time of Moses. The same are here marked out, and distinguished by the greatest authority among Christians. Under this concluding dispensation, beyond which we may look for no other, they are the great head of duty. It is the excellence of the gospel, that it has given clearer directions as to the expressions of love than are found in any other revelation; and at the same

same time has opened up other and new obligations to it; exhibiting in the life of Jesus a perfect pattern of love; discovering God in all the beauties of holiness, and man as connected with man, and christian with christian, by the strictest ties. That there might arise no despair from the remembrance of guilt, the source of enmity, inimical to love, to sour and embitter the spirit, an allsufficient atonement is provided---That our hearts might be engaged to God, he is the author of this great salvation---That they might be warmed to our neighbour, he is the partaker of it, having one Lord and one faith. 1 Tim. i. 5. The end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned. This is the law to all the world, and ever shall be---To Pagans of all denominations---To the Jew and the Samaritan, and to Christians of every sect. Love is the fulfilling of the law; and the end of our ministry, who are put in trust with the Gospel, is, that we may edify the body of Christ in love.

2dly. We learn that their notions are preposterous and ill founded, who place religion altogether in acts of social virtue.

The world is ever running into extremes; and there is a fashion in religion no less than in other things. The former age saw and admired a religion which was placed entirely in the exercises of piety, without

without any due regard to the love of our neighbour: a maimed, defective religion. But now charity has its turn, and a more unaccountable mode has obtained, out of which piety is excluded. Men have learned to think that if they are just, humane, generous, and not extravagantly debauched, all is well with them, and shall be so for ever. These sentiments suit such as are constitutionally inclined to sociality and good fellowship: disposing to the virtues that are popular, they suit such as are fond of esteem and applause; they suit also the politeness which is found in the higher ranks, the effect of a refined education, which smooths the words and manners, and makes a decorum of behaviour the great idol. The scheme of religion founded upon these sentiments, is likewise assumed, without examination, by numbers amongst the inferior classes, who, in this, as in other things, affect to imitate their superiors. At present it has its run. The world has gone after it: there is a wild enthusiasm in its favour. Hence so little devotion in the closet; hardly the face of religion in families; and the public assemblies for worship forsaken, or irregularly attended. But fashion is not to determine for us here, where our all is at stake, and we may not follow the multitude. Is there a God who ruleth in the earth, the creator, preserver, and judge of men, and shall he be set aside in our regards? Is the first and greatest Being
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in the universe to be alone disrespected and disesteemed? We are just and kind to men, and is it a small matter that we render not to God the homage that is due? We love them that love us. Our obligations to him are infinite, yet are they alone never to be acknowledged? We prize benevolence in ourselves and among our brethren, and yet are we so ungenerous and illiberal as not to express our esteem of that Being whose benevolence is infinite, who has put it in our power to be kind to others, who proposes to our view another state, where charity shall have freer scope through all eternity, who has sent forth his own Son to conduct us thither.

There is room with us for the ancient expostulation, Mal. i. 6. If I be a father, where is mine honour, and if I be a master, where is my fear, saith the Lord of Hosts unto you.—Our fancy of a religion without a God, is in the judgment of reason, absurd and ill grounded, and overthrown from the foundation, by Jesus, in his answer to the Scribe: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. They are linked together by the highest authority, and placed the one in due subordination to the other; and they ought never to be put asunder or transposed. He is presuming indeed, who will disarrange them, and

say of these commands, the first shall be last and the last shall be first. Who will reverse the order which God hath established among his own laws, turn them upside down? He is daring indeed, who will take away from the words of this book, the commandment which is the greatest of all, and the foundation of all.

It belongs to us, who are ministers of the gospel, to give a check to this prevailing impiety. Providence, who has ordered our lot in these times of general revolt, designs it, as our task, to plead the cause of God with men, to persuade them to render unto God the things that are Gods, to repair his altars re his worship. Pf. cxxxii. 8, 9. Arise, O Lord, into thy rest: thou and the ark of thy strength. Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness, and let thy saints shout for joy.

3dly. Learn that there is little reason to assert the doctrine of merit.

The church of Rome has taught that the good works of a justified person merit eternal life, that by strictness of life he may go beyond what he is bound to do, and so perform works of supererogation, which being imputed, are available to others. An enticing doctrine to the rich of this world. Out of this stock they may go and buy; it is not hard for them to enter into the kingdom of heaven.

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I mean not to detain you with the confutation of a doctrine, which stands in the creed of so vast a church; yet is found in the Bible of no christian. But I will examine it by the great commandment: This is the standard of duty.—Who has fulfilled this? Is there a just man on earth,—any among the myriads of the saints of Rome, who has kept this commandment blameless. Such has done his duty, and what he ought to have done: No more: He has laid no obligation upon God: Where then is merit? Luke xvii. 9.

If after this another question may be put, who has done more than kept this commandment? Of those who have gone beyond others in fastings, prayers, penances, pilgrimages, and alms, where is he that hath done more than this law requires? Supposing his body given to be burnt, and his goods to feed the poor, and all for God's sake, Has he more than loved him with all his heart, and soul, and mind, and strength. The commandment is exceeding broad: there is no possibility of outdoing it. Where then are the works of supererogation? We cannot reach this height of virtue, far less go beyond it. It belongs to us to sit down and humbly lament our own deficiency.—We have all failed and come short of the glory of God. Of all that have been born into the world, Jesus alone fulfilled the Law. Having assumed our nature, which he was not bound

to do, and in that nature obeyed the law, which otherwise had been no law to him, he brought in everlasting righteousness. This righteousness, which is of God by faith, exhibited in the gospel covenant, is the only righteousness, by the merit of which we may be benefited, and on which we can rely.

This law shows the absurdity of all self merit and self confidence. It is the schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ. We preach the end of the law for righteousness to all that believe.

4thly, Learn that the love and fear of God are perfectly consistent with one another.

This is a point, touched for the sake of those of a delicate and timid frame, who are sincere in the service of God, and yet entertain doubts concerning their own state, from an apprehension, that their obedience has proceeded altogether from fear. Such disquiet themselves in vain. Their fear only proves, that their love is not perfect, but by no means, that they are without it. It is true there is a fear inconsistent with love, which fixes entirely upon what is awful in God, and attends not to what is amiable.—A slavish fear.—The fear of devils who repent not to give him glory. This disarms the soul, locks up its active powers, and sinks it into a state of comfortless, dark despondency. But this is easy to be distinguished from the fear which proceeds from just notions of the divine nature,

ture, and is attended with a solicitous endeavour to obey his will. Such is so far from excluding love, that it implies it, and cannot be without a mixture of it. In the present state of man, prone to evil, and beset with temptations, there is hardly a surer symptom of love to God, than a painful jealousy over ourselves, lest we offend him. Where there is love to our heavenly Father, there is usually a fear of caution, in exact proportion to it.—What the apostle says of ingenuous sorrow, may be applied to love; 2 Cor. 7. 11, Behold what carefulness it works; yea, what fear? The Psalmist declares his knowledge and persuasion of their perfect consistency, in a very beautiful passage, where he evidently, and with design, puts the one for the other; Psalm xxx. 4. There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared. These two affections co-operate together with entire harmony, having each its different province. Fear is usually the first source of penitent resolutions: It gives the first alarm, and brings the sinner to himself. Men and brethren, what shall we do? It is the beginning of wisdom. Love influences the convert in the after steps of duty, gaining the ascendant more and more, as he makes progress. Fear deters from sin. Love animates and prompts to a cheerful obedience. These affections are like weights in a machine, contrived to balance one another, and regulate

gulate the motion of the whole. Fear hinders love from growing to presumption: Love checks the principle of fear, and prevents it from sinking into a wretched fruitless despondency; agreeably to which we are exhorted, Psalm ii. 11. Serve God with fear, and rejoice with trembling.

Be not discouraged then, ye that serve God, though your obedience may seem at present, the meer effect of fear. This fear implies love. Now love is weak; or, through your diffidence, hardly perceived: yet it will acquire strength as you advance. At length, when you are translated into a better world, and fixed in a state of immutable virtue, there will remain nothing of fear beside a rational reverence of the Deity, such as the Seraphims are not without, which cover their faces with their wings. When you join the angels, and serve with them, you shall serve from the same motive. In that region of light, love shall swallow up all other affections, and engross the whole soul. God shall be all and in all. There is no fear in the love of heaven. Perfect love casteth out fear. 1 John iv. 18.

While you remain upon earth, remember that this divine affection is a gift, as well as a duty, that God himself is at once the author, and the object of it. Solicit in your daily fervent prayers, that this fruit of the Spirit may be shed abroad in your hearts.

hearts. This is the exhortation of the apostle Jude; But ye beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost. Keep yourselves in the love of God. I conclude all, with the apostolical benediction, 2 Theff. iii. 5. The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ; and grant that ye may be holy, and without blame, before him, in love. Amen.

S E R M O N II.

CHRISTIANS CALLED THE FRIENDS OF J E S U S.

JOHN XV. 15.

Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doth: But I have called you Friends, for all things that I have heard of my Father, I have made known unto you.

PREACHED BEFORE THE CELEBRATION OF THE
LORD'S SUPPER.

JESUS is now with the eleven disciples. He that should betray him had gone forth; and they that remained were all clean. They are in the guest-chamber, where, after eating the passover, He had instituted the supper, the memorial of his death: Or they are together on the way from this chamber to the brook Cedron, beyond which was the garden where his last sufferings were to commence. Every word that dropt from his lips, at so interesting a season, would be caught with eagerness by this select company, and must be esteemed by us weighty and

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memorable. This very precious interval of time is totally devoted to the small circle of the disciples, even now happy at least in this, that they were so peculiarly the objects of his attention and favour. He instructs them; He encourages them; and He prays for them. Three chapters are filled up with the edifying record of his discourses. In the generous warmth of his heart, he addresses them by a name which was new, and which, so far as we learn from the Evangelists, he had seldom used till now; the name of Friends. There is in the history of this night an example of friendship to which a parallel cannot be found. To those who had accompanied him from the time of his shewing unto Israel, and were to continue with him in his temptations, Jesus says, "Henceforth I call you not servants." Not that he acquitted them as servants; this relation could not be annulled; the obligation of it could not cease; the cheerful performance of the duties belonging to it was that chiefly which entitled them to a higher denomination. But he waves this name of distance and dependance, that he might bestow a nobler one, implying many high privileges, particularly that here specified, in the way of example, an intimacy of communion far beyond what could belong to servants. "But I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father, I have made known unto you."

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This name is assumed by all that are baptized, and profess the religion of Jesus, and the charity, or rather the courtesy of the world, allows them to bear it. But at first it was given to the apostles; and of right it belongs only to them who continue in the apostles doctrine, or whose faith and practice correspond to the christian profession. This name is assumed, especially, by all that sit down at a communion table. But it belongs only to such as are worthy. The Lord knoweth them that are his. Friend how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding garment?

By way of preparation for the ensuing sacred service, which only the friends of Jesus can discharge acceptably,

I. I shall make some general observations concerning this relation, and speak of the friend, as distinguished from the servant.

II. I shall point out, in some instances, the peculiar privileges of such as Jesus calls friends.

I. I shall make some general observations concerning this relation, and speak of the friend as distinguished from the servant.

I take no notice of the friendships of the world, which are properly confederacies in vice, but of friendship which is founded on virtue. This commonly takes place, where there is a likeness in the temper and dispositions of the mind; and the greater

er the resemblance is, the closer usually is the attachment. Friendship is contracted most usually among those whose rank and station in the world are nearly equal; yet is not entirely confined to this level of parity. Wisdom condescends, and goes down to find a friend: whilst excellence and accomplishments of mind exalt the man of low degree. This intimacy is not conciliated by contrivance, by design, or prudence of endeavours, but is often brought about in a way not to be accounted for, without acknowledging a divine influence. Such as we read of in the case of Joseph, Gen. xxxix. 21. The Lord was with him, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison. This relation of a friend is more honourable than that of a servant. The relation of a servant places one at a distance, and beneath his master, and keeps him a stranger to his councils; but that of friend, implies nearness, intimacy, and communion. In the two relations, the principles of duty are not less different. The labour of a servant, is undertaken as his task. He engages in it, because it may not be declined: he executes it under the impression of authority and awe; and if that which is prescribed him can be finished, he counts he has done enough. But the offices of a friend are yielded, rather than required; voluntary and cheerful, not exacted; performed, not from the spirit of bondage, but with a
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free spirit ; doing what he can, he only regrets that he cannot do all he would.

The work of a servant is mercenary. The reward moves him in it, and is often the measure of it: the hireling hastens to finish his day or his term. Whereas the friend is disinterested, is ingenious in finding out what may be acceptable, and ardent in doing it. He will not be discharged, or set free.

Friendship may be interrupted and violated by the breach of faith or by gross injuries. But of itself, it is averse to dissolution, and tends to continuance. It is the union of souls. Friends have but one heart. Like the members of the body, they have the same care one for another. Whether one suffers, the other suffers also ; or if one be honoured, the other rejoices with it. Their interests are blended: their lot is in a manner one. Love which is the bond of it, eminently bears the characters of charity described by the Apostle, 1 Cor. xii. 5. 7. Charity seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity, in consequence, never faileth. This is the strictest and most permanent tie. It contributes exceedingly to the comfort of a present life, in prosperity or in adversity. The evils of this state are by happy participation alleviated. Under great and sudden shocks of calamity, two are better than one.

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In the sun shine of life, the joy of friends is doubled by being communicated and diffused. In circumstances of perplexity, the doubts of friends are resolved by mutual counsel. In every condition it is the source of felicity. Moses in his enumeration of the close relations in society has distinguished this, as beyond all others in strictness and comfort, Deut. xv. 6. Thy brother, the son of thy mother, thy daughter, the wife of thy bosom, and he brings up at last with an high encomium, that which he meant was the greatest of all, thy friend which is as thine own soul.

Jesus has ennobled this character by assuming it, and by owning his disciples as standing in this relation to himself. He was found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and was made flesh, as that he might expiate sin, so that he might experience the feelings of human nature, and become a friend. Here he is entering upon a very tender scene, surrounded by the few faithful servants of his life, from whom he was now to be separated. The shepherd was to be cut off, and the sheep scattered; they were to be exposed as lambs, in the midst of wolves. He felt their coming sorrows; and opening his heart, poured forth his consolations, but especially encouraged them, by owning them as his friends. Henceforth, I call you not servants, but friends.

II. I propose to point out, in some instances, the distinguishing privileges of such as Jesus calls friends.

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It is fit I should here premise a short account of the friendship of Jesus to mankind. Col. i. 16, 17. By him were all things created. He is before all things, and by him all things consist. His good will may be traced back beyond the date of time: His loving kindness has been of old, forever. The movings of it waited not till we were brought into existence: they prevented this, and issued forth in purposes of good, when as yet there was none of us. His power was exerted in producing objects for his own love.

The being or existence of man was not all the debt to the Creator. He formed him after his own image, in his own likeness. He drew upon his mind, the traces of his own perfections. He prepared a body the fit vehicle of a pure soul; exhibiting in him as it were a shadow or figure of deity incarnate. In this state of innocence, man was only a little lower than the angels. Merit indeed was wanting, and he had nothing that he had not received, which he might first give unto his blessed Maker. Yet, was he in all respects the proper recipient of the divine favour and goodness.

At the fall, man forfeited the life he had received, and effaced the divine image. The glory departed: he could not then be the object of the divine complacence, but the goodness of Jesus was turned into pity. His heart was not alienated from

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man, debased and deformed. He contrived his recovery to life, to happiness, to virtue, and to glory. On his behalf, he yielded unto God all that justice required. He supported the honour and dignity of the government of God, by sustaining the dreadful punishment of sin. By the riches of his wisdom and grace in our redemption, the greatness of the love of Jesus comes to be measured; but this is inestimable. Herein is his love commended in, that, when we were enemies, he died for us.

To create man, when he was not, to form him for himself, that he might be the object of his favour, to bless him abundantly, to bless heaven and earth, and make them fruitful for his sake; when he had fallen by willful rebellion, to spare him, to recover him, to admit him again as a servant; and what is more, to advance him to the honour of a friend, and in this to the hope of infinitely greater bliss than he had forfeited: Here is a progress of goodness, by many wonderful steps, and a towering height of it, which must strike us with admiration. This is goodness tendered to all the children of men, by Jesus in the revelation of the gospel. He is the saviour of all men, the propitiation for the sins of the whole world.

This display of the friendship of Jesus in creation and redemption, shows the obligation all are under to him; it tends to conciliate in all love and friendship

ship to him; it renders those inexcusable who reject him.

They that embrace his mercy, that yield themselves to him, and entertain in their hearts, affections corresponding to his love; they are his friends; they hear that sound which has gone through the earth: in so far they are partakers with mankind of the heavenly calling; but besides, there are certain inestimable privileges, not common to all that hear the gospel, but peculiar to this endearing relation, which belong unto them. Of which I shall mention a few.

1. Access to him, the easy, welcome admittance, which one friend finds with another.

Sin had placed us at a distance from God, the supreme good of man. Jesus has brought us near by the blood of his cross, or his mediation in heaven. In this Jew and Gentile are all alike indebted to him; for through him, we both have an access by one spirit to the father. We have access with boldness, and may draw near with true hearts, in the full assurance of faith. Besides this, I speak especially of the access, which christians have to Jesus; who is the one mediator between God and man. Betwixt him, and his friends on earth, there is need of none to mediate; the way is open and patent. His terrors that might make us afraid, are laid aside. The glories of divine majesty, which might dazzle mortals, are veiled.

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In our own nature, not that of angels, but of man, he hath sat down on high. He is blood of our blood, and flesh of our flesh, touched with our infirmities. His invitation is familiar and condescending; Come unto me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. If we believe in him, and hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; if we forget not the ties and duties of our other relations, which cannot be annulled, of creatures, of subjects, of servants; and preserve that esteem and love of him, to which he is always and every way entitled: then we may approach him as friends; we shall find him in the courts of his own house; in the solitude of the field, or the retirement of the closet; wherever we worship, the Lord will be in that place; and whenever we are devout, his presence will be with us: he will incline his ear to hear, and will answer our prayers, John xiv. 14. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it. In the service of the supper, he will be more immediately with us; and by a special presence, make it a communion. Of this we have assurance, in that call usually applied to it, and given in the character and language of a friend, Rev. iii. 20. Behold I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

2. A second privilege of friends, following the other,

ther, and intended in the text, is the free communication of his will and counsels. There is in this relation more than access and intimacy; there is also a mutual confidence, which leads to unbofom ourselves without reserve to a friend. He is thought to have an interest in our secrets, which are locked up from all the world besides. God distinguished the faints of ancient times, by nothing more, than by special communications of his will to them. James ii. 23. Abraham was called the friend of God; and you know to what familiarity of this kind he was admitted. Gen. xviii. 17. And the Lord said, (when he meant to destroy Sodom,) shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do. He might even commune and expostulate with God concerning his deepest purposes. Moses and Aaron were invited to a near attendance, when all Israel, priests, and people, were thundred away, and sat at a distance in the defence and covering of the cloud Ex. xix. Moses received his dictates, when he went up unto God, in the recesses of the fiery mountain, xxxiii. 11. And the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend.

Under the gospel, a dispensation of nearness and freedom, the great privilege of former times may be varied, but is not discontinued. Whilst Jesus himself dwelt with men, he had his select friends to whom every thing was imparted, as far as they

were able to bear. They were always with him, in his going out and coming in, at every hour, in every place. In their difficulties they had his counsel, and in their doubts his resolutions. Luke viii. 10. Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to others in parables. When he was taken from them personally, his promise gave them ground to expect that this communication, in place of being intercepted, would still be more ample. Ch. xiv. 22. Lord how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us and not unto the world? This question was soon resolved, his promise was at once unfolded and verified. When he ascended he gave them gifts that God the Lord might dwell among them. He sent the Comforter to teach them all things, and to bring all things to remembrance whatsoever he had said. This privilege is not withheld from them which have not seen and yet have believed, otherwise, why were they pronounced especially blessed? It is continued with his friends in the world through every generation: and it cannot be diminished, now that he has gone and received a kingdom. According to the character given him in prophecy, he is the Mighty Counsellor. By his Spirit which he sends, he opens the understanding of his people, he reveals himself to them, and lays open, in fulness of light and evidence, the way of salvation through him; nay,

may, with a particular indulgence to some whose hard circumstances and severe trials in life require special encouragement, he makes known their open interest in this salvation, and imparts other discoveries tending to comfort them, filling them with hope, joy, and peace in believing, which is the received purport of that passage in the book of Rev. ii. 7. To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written which no man knoweth, saving he which receiveth it.

3. Another privilege of the friends of Jesus, is his sympathy with them in their griefs and sorrows. The bearing one anothers burdens is amongst the first offices of friendship, and it contributes exceedingly to lessen the woes of human life. Jesus possessed much of this tenderness, of which his disciples had daily proofs while he was with them. A kind concern for them in the dismal scenes that were soon to open, engrossed his soul in this night wherein he was betrayed, and dictated this consolatory farewell discourse. The highest provocations offered him by any of them, did not wholly deprive them of this treasure of comfort. Peter had denied him thrice. Jesus looked upon Peter when the cock crowed, and he went forth and wept bitterly. His soul was pierced with poignant grief, and he suffered whatever the reproaches of an awakened
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conscience could inflict, a punishment heavier than he was able to bear. Overwhelmed with trouble, he then dreaded more than all the last resentment of his injured master. But, where the highest resentment might have been expected, he met with nothing but pity. Jesus seemed to have forgot his grievous offence, and to remember only the sorrow of the offender, when, by a special message of kindness, he saved him from the depths of despair. It was committed to the angel, and by him delivered to the pious women early on the morning of the resurrection. Mark. xvi. 7. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee. Omit not Peter by any means. Be sure that he in particular be especially informed of this event. Leave him not a moment longer to doubt of my favourable notice. Let him share with my brethren the joy of my resurrection. Jesus saw before him the future obstinacy of the Jews and Gentiles, which would frustrate the grace of God for their salvation; and his concern for the world gave pain much more racking than the nails or the spear: And if he felt so deeply for enemies of his cross, what must have been his sympathy with friends! He is now ascended unto his God and our God, in the human nature, and with all its feelings. Our sins of infirmity avert not his concern for us. He who bare the sins of men in his own body on the tree,

now

now bears in his soul, with tender sympathy, the sufferings of his afflicted disciples. Heb. ii. 17. 18. Wherefore it behoved him in all things to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted. iv. 15. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. How inestimable is the comfort, which, under the sore calamities, and in the direful passages of human life, we may derive from an humble confidence in such a friend. The distance of heaven, which is high above the earth, hinders not our access to him; nothing intervenes that can prevent him regarding us in our low estate. When we flee to him in the day of distress, we cast our cares upon one that careth for us. The words of the ancient prophets give the language of his friendship. Is. xliii. 1. 2. Fear not, for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee; and through the rivers they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burnt, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.

4th. A further privilege of the friends of Jesus is the kind allowance he makes for them even when they offend him.

Here is the rock fatal to human friendships, and where they are not seldom wrecked: men have affection and sympathy, but often want forbearance. They cannot pass over the omissions and lesser failings to which all are liable. Hence peevishness and mere misunderstanding give rise to variance, which daily separate close connections. It is true, that unfaithfulness, and gross trespasses, subvert the very foundations of this relation, and discharge from it: at the same time it is necessary, to the comfort, and very subsistence of it, that what is less heinous be overlooked and candidly interpreted: that unfavourable reports be utterly discredited, and real offences viewed in all their alleviations. In this is seen the vanity and instability of friendship with men; at the same time, in this point is discovered the excellence of the friendship of Jesus. That which renders it secure to us is, that he grants us every condescending forbearance.

This intercourse with his disciples furnishes many encouraging instances of his forbearance. —He had besought their attendance and prayers at a very tender season, when his condition might have engaged them without any entreaty; in the garden, when his soul was exceeding sorrowful,

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even unto death: but so little they felt for him, even while he was bearing their griefs, that in a very short space he found them fast asleep. All the reprehension, however, they received, was, Mat. xxvi. 40. What, could ye not watch with me for one hour? This admonition was not long remembered: returning again, and finding them overcome with heaviness, he brought forth an apology, instead of any reprimand, such as they could not offer for themselves. The spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak. When the same offence was aggravated by a third repetition, he still went no farther in resentment of their hard hearted insensibility, than this exceeding soft reproof, Mark xiv. 41. Sleep on now, and take your rest: it is enough: the hour is come.

How suitable is such a friend to a state of imperfection, wherein there is no man that liveth and sinneth not. He sympathises in our sorrows, and also bears with our faults. He will not mark our sins without considering how far they have flowed from human weakness and infirmity. He will not state our guilt without taking away whatever can be placed to the account of surprise. Where sin has been unwillingly committed, or speedily and unfeignedly repented of, it will be blotted out in the times of refreshing. He knows our frame, and remembers that we are dust. This

is a privilege of his friends most conciliating and endearing, which gives the highest encouragement and the most reviving hope. And what renders this altogether invaluable is, that we know, the same candid compassionate friend is our advocate with the Father. 1 John ii. 1. 2. and pleads for us; is the ruler of this lower world, and carves out our portion of present things; and is also appointed our judge, and will, by the same rules of equity, decide our eternal lot. John v. 22. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment to the Son ver. 27. because he is the Son of Man. 1. Cor. iv. 4. He that judgeth me is the Lord. Pf. lxxii. 2. He shall judge thy people with righteousness, 4. He shall judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy.

5thly, The great commendation of all these privileges is, that the friendship of Jesus is constant and perpetual.

There is a certain degree of fickleness in man, inseparable from the best. He seems infected with it in his origin, or smitten by the world, wherein every thing is mutable and changing: and this must needs tincture our friendships. But Jesus is not of this world, that the fashion of it should affect him, and he is not man that he should change. An evenness and constancy marked his whole intercourse with the disciples. They found him the same in all the

the variety of outward circumstances. He was not alienated from them, even by their inconstancy; their slowness of understanding; their backwardness to believe; their froward passions and resentments; and, even their want of sympathy with him could not disaffect him. Now that he is ascended unto his God, and to our God, above this place of vicissitudes, he is the same, without variableness or shadow of turning: And the same is the character of his friendship; having loved his own, he loved them unto the end. In this world, under the government administered by him, his friends shall be distinguished. They cannot be exempted from evils and trials, which he knows to be necessary and medicinal. But their best interests shall be consulted and advanced. Rom. viii. 28. And we know, that all things work together, for good to them that love him. In his spiritual distributions of blessings that are always good, their portion shall be liberal. Unto him that hath shall be given. He is head over all things to his body, which is the church. His friendship has this singular commendation to mortal men, that it remains at that awful period which dissolves every human tie. Death devours our most potent friends of earth. Their breath goeth forth; that very day their thoughts perish; but over him it has no power; being raised from the dead, he dieth no more.

When there is no friend to ransom us from the grave, or to attend us in the state of the dead, he who descended into hades, shall be our guide. His rod and staff shall comfort us in the dark valley, that we shall fear no ill. Christ Jesus shall receive our spirits in departing, and shall not neglect our bodies. When friends here have done the last office, by burying them out of their sight, he has pleasure in their very dust. Of all that are given him, he shall lose nothing, but will raise it up again at the last day. The friends of Jesus shall not die; but rather sleep: They shall fall asleep in him. Beyond this great gulf lies the happy region, whither he is conducting us. There the body of Jesus shall receive fulness of stature, by the perfect indissoluble union of all his members. There the communications of his love shall be immediate and full; and our capacities improved and strengthened for perfect and endless enjoyment. In his presence there is fulness of joy, and at his right hand are pleasures for evermore. There shall be mutual communion to enhance their felicity; every member rejoicing with every other member: I believe in the communion of saints.

These, and all the ripened fruits of friendship we are encouraged to look for, by his exceeding great and precious promises. Faith and hope may take their boldest flight; it is impossible they should
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soar too high. I quote only one promise, conceived in the language of a faithful, never failing friend, John xiv. 2, 3. In my father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you: I go to prepare a place for you; and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also. What are these mansions? What is it that the love of Jesus hath prepared for them that love him? Future enjoyment will mock all present expectation. The completion alone can interpret here. We shall be fitter to confer of these things, when we have met again, and are one in Christ. In his words of promise there must remain much mystery, till he come.— Come quickly, amen: Even so come Lord Jesus.

Jesus this day accosts us as a friend: He treats us as friends: He hath covered for us this table, and brought us into his banqueting house. Here is his body broken, and his blood shed: the communion of his body, and of his blood. Here are offered the pledges of his love. Here are the tenders made us of all the privileges that can distinguish friends. What shall we render to the Lord? Mutual love is obviously due. My beloved is mine, and I am his. We are bound to dedicate unto him, our substance, our bodies, our souls, our life, our all. The love of Christ constraineth us. It is not for us to forget,

get, when he deals with us as friends, that we are servants; still bound to do all his pleasure. We are thy servants, truly, we are thy servants. We are the more so, that he hath loosed our bonds, and henceforth calleth us not servants, but friends. We will bind with cords the sacrifice unto the horns of the altar. Let this covenant, like his friendship, be perpetual. Jesus, the faithful and true witness, is the faithful and true friend. He will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. He will withhold from thee no good thing. Be thou faithful unto death, and he will give thee a crown of life. Amen.

S E R M O N III.

CHRIST HATH THE WORDS OF ETERNAL LIFE.

JOHN VI. 68, 69.

Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away?

Then Simon Peter answered and said, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.

THERE is recorded, in the beginning of this chapter, one of the rare seasons in our Saviour's life, which might seem to encourage the secular hopes of his disciples. The miracle of the loaves, by which he discovered a power sufficient to subsist armies, and to ensure conquests, drew multitudes around him. They were ambitious and ardent. He could not escape from them, even by miraculously crossing the sea: They took shipping, and found him on the other side. But he detected the motive of their zeal; and wishing to check their hopes of temporal happiness in his kingdom, he exhibited himself in the preceding discourse, as the bread of life, preferable to the loaves, with which so many had been fed the preceding night; or, to
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the manna that had fed their departed fathers in the wilderness. He spoke to them of ascending up into heaven, where he was before, in place of mounting a throne on earth. And he told them, that by faith they would partake of the bread which he gave, and so live for ever. These words conveyed ideas too spiritual and refined, by no means suiting their views and wishes. They blame them as hard sayings. Chaffed with the disappointment, they are offended, and drop off from him, v. 66. From that time, many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Amidst this general revolt, is the question here put. Will ye also go away? Not to insinuate any distrust of his little attached family: But for two purposes, chiefly:

1. To put them upon examining themselves, how far they were pure and disinterested in their adherence to him; or, if they followed him from worldly motives, as the multitude did, for the loaves.
2. To furnish them with an opportunity of distinguishing themselves from this giddy multitude, by a public and open profession of their faith and steadfastness.

Then follows the answer, v. 68. These are the words of men indeed determined; not halting between two opinions; the words of unshaken fidelity. They come from the mouth of Peter, the first, as he is wont to be, in every expression of regard. Upon such occasions, he pre-

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vents every one else; yet without seeking to leave any one behind. In the name of all his brethren, and with a charity, which adorned his zeal, he answers, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.

There are still with us, as in the days of Jesus, multitudes who, not finding under him a temporal kingdom with the worldly advantages and indulgences they desire, and no ways relishing a spiritual one, are strangely disaffected to the gospel. So that the same searching question may still with propriety be put, Will you also go away? I hope ye will resist the force of corrupt example, and stem the overflowing tide of apostacy; and, like the apostles, rooted and grounded in the faith, adopt their reply, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.

In this confession there are expressed three things. 1. Their strong desire of eternal life. 2. Their fixed persuasion that a guide was necessary in order to men's attaining it; and, 3. Their choice of Jesus in preference to all others, as their guide.

I shall endeavour to treat these several particulars; speaking of the two former shortly, in the way to the latter, which seems to require a fuller illustration.

I. There is here expressed their strong desire of eternal life: but for this desire that could not be repressed, they also might have gone away.

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There is in the mind of every man an insuperable aversion to the thoughts of death and annihilation, with a strong desire of life and happiness. These secret tendencies and wishes of the human soul, so general and powerful, cannot be all delusion; there must be somewhat real corresponding to them. The inequalities in the divine administration confirm the presumptions of a future state, and encourage the native desire of immortality. They lead to conclude that verily there is a future life, and verily a reward for the righteous. Now these expectations and desires are the great springs of religion in the world. In proportion as men are more or less concerned for another life, religion is more or less the object of their attention and regard.

Rich men, who have set their heart upon uncertain riches, are generally so much devoted to Mammon, that they cannot serve God; and so well pleased with their present lot, that they cannot think of an hereafter. Being full, they deny God. It is hard for them to enter into the kingdom.—The covetous, even though unprosperous, are not less taken up with the world than the rich. They are glued to it in their affections; they see not beyond it, and rise not above it. The world engrosses their soul, and is their God. So having no real desire for another life, they have no religion.—The sensual and voluptuous have their souls pre-occupied.

Whoredom

Whoredom and wine take away the heart. Enchanted by present objects, they dislike the thought of futurity: they reason and struggle against it; and from their minds religion is banished.—Men of levity and dissipation ramble from one amusement to another. With them all is vanity; objects invisible affect not them. Hence are they totally inattentive to religion, and care for none of these things.

All these characters, however, have their qualms and serious seasons. Circumstances do occur which force them to think. Their first endeavour in this situation, is to reason themselves out of the belief of another world, but this is not easy to be accomplished. They cannot get thoroughly satisfied, or wholly subdue their apprehensions concerning a future state. This first effort is fruitless, and some other resource must be sought for. At the hours of thought and foreboding, which perhaps are not rare or strange in the lives of the most unprincipled, they have their fits of goodness. They would be friends with God and religion.

When men fall into extreme distress, or are laid on beds of sickness; when the rich, dreading his departure, finds that his treasure cannot redeem his soul from the grave, and that of his all he can carry nothing hence—When the covetous finds that he must cease from his restless unavailing labour which is wholly vain—When the voluptuous finds that

there remains no pleasure more, which he can relish, in all that is under the sun;—Then bursts the cloud in which they have wrapped themselves: Light breaks in: another world opens to near view: they must step into it; for here there is none abiding. Religion then comes with these impressions of futurity. It is the late resource of all characters; they call every man upon his God; men and brethren, what shall we do?

It must be owned, that even where these impressions have been prevented by circumstances, men may join in the profession and outward exercises of religion; fashion, example, or interest inducing them. But that is no more than the form of godliness, without all power, wanting the sincerity and ardour essential to vital real religion. It cannot bring real advantage, or find acceptance with God. Heb. xi. 6. “But without faith it is impossible to please God, for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”

By what has been said it must appear—and by our observations of mankind, in life and in history, we must be more and more convinced,—that impressions of a future state, and the desire of eternal life are at the bottom of all religion.

How came the disciples here to dissent from the mob of Christ's followers? These last had followed him

him for the loaves, and for the sake of other secular advantages, which this miracle led them to expect; and finding their hopes frustrated, they walked no more with him. But the disciples having other and higher views, looking beyond the world, remained with their Master now, and continued with him in his temptation.—True it is, that they also entertained the expectations of a temporal kingdom. But then their doing so, we read, drew upon them the severe reproofs and censures of their blessed Lord. After Pentecost was fully come, these expectations were finally banished from their minds; their attachment became disinterested; and then it was real, and invincible, and acceptable. Then it came to pass, as we read, 2 Cor. iv. 8, 9, 10. They were troubled, persecuted, cast down, delivered to death, yet under all fainted not. The reason of which there assigned is truly memorable, and much to the purpose of our present argument—Life wrought in them, that is, the desire of life—explained, ver. 18. They looked not at the things which are seen, which are temporal, but at the things which are not seen, which are eternal, and for these they groaned earnestly.

II. You have expressed, in the text, not only the strong desire of the disciples after eternal life, but also their fixed persuasion that a guide was necessary in order to their attaining it.

If

If men's desires of eternal life are strong and ardent, many things will occur to send them out of themselves, and above the world, to find a sure guide to it. They will then be anxious and inquisitive; like them which waited of old for the redemption of Israel.

When we see others about us stepping off the stage, we cannot help reflecting that we are all under the same destiny. Death must appear then a dark step, and most discouraging to our hopes. In that gloomy hour, how natural to the mind of man, is that scepticism expressed inimitably in the book of Job xiv. 7. 12. 14. Depressed with such apprehensions, and utterly at a loss, while at the same time the desire of life remains, and is rather encreased, the necessity of an instructor, and guide strikes us; and we are in a manner impelled to wish, that he who made us, would interpose, that he would send out some one to direct us in the way of life, that he would open before us the invisible world, and conduct us through the intervening valley, that lies between. Or even without dwelling in our imagination upon the mouth of the grave, which is ever open, and devouring some; it must occur to every thinking mind, in the calmest hour, that life and happiness beyond the gulf, are only the gift of God; therefore to be conferred only upon his own terms, which cannot be known with certainty sufficient

ficient to satisfy us in a point so vast and interesting, without a clear intimation of them from himself. How justice in God can be reconciled with mercy shewn to the sinner? How he shall be treated as innocent whom the law pronounces guilty? Or how life shall be granted to him, whom the law has condemned to die? These are hard questions, and not to be resolved by us. Besides, in the present state of human nature, men are not only obnoxious to the law and justice of God, by sin committed, but are thereby likewise impure and miserably depraved; utterly unmeet for any state of happiness, or life of virtuous felicity to be expected from God. How shall man be sanctified, not less than justified? How be restored to the capacity, as well as the title of bliss. These are mountains high indeed, which arise in the way of all the hopes of nature. These difficulties are to us insuperable, and evince the necessity of a supernatural guide. How presumptuous are they, who boast the sufficiency of reason to resolve them, and to extricate us out of this maze of doubt and perplexity. Can the reason of man search out to perfection the deep things of God? Can human reason estimate or scan the rules of the divine government? The difficulties now suggested, are points which reason unassisted, has never been able, through the ages of the world that are past, to clear or conciliate; and what it has never been able

able to do for others, there is little ground to believe or hope it will do effectually for us. Reason has gone far, to mark out for man a rule of life, but has done nothing to devise for sinners a way of salvation. They who have urged it farthest in moral disquisitions, have owned that it failed them here. Wise men of old, have expressed not their wishes only, but their expectations of a divine interposition, nay, even ventured to conjecture, as to the manner and circumstances in which they judged it likely, the messenger of God, the desire of all nations would appear. Reason discovered, and betrayed its own insufficiency, and so led men to look higher.

The disciples never once thought of apostatizing to reason, or that by its light they could grope out the way of life; but were convinced that they must be beholden to some superior light. Neither thought they of returning to Moses. That great lawgiver, was by his own declaration, no more than the harbinger of a more illustrious prophet, Deut. xviii. 15. A prophet shall the Lord thy God, raise up unto thee from among thy brethren, from the midst of you, of thy brethren, hearken unto him. They knew, that were he again to descend from mount Nebo, he would himself confess, he was not that light, but sent to bear witness of it. He was but their school master, to bring unto Christ, coming before, to point

point out the Lamb of God, and the true light. The multitudes were now deserting Christ as eagerly as they had a little before crowded after him, compassing sea and land. But this torrent of example, carried not the apostles off, for their lot in this life was troublesome, uncertain and precarious: their hopes of a better to come, they might not quit, and they could not find another or more sure guide to it, therefore they cleaved to him.—Lord, to whom shall we go?—I hope, the same rational motive is strong in every breast, and will engage to the like wife, and stedfast resolution. Whosoever cleaves to him, has an anchor cast within the Veil: this will fix our soul, amidst the fears within, ready to overwhelm us, and the reelings of a fluctuating, unstable world, without.

There is here,

III. The choice of Jesus, in preference to all others, as their guide to life, with the reason of it.

In recommending the same choice to you, I shall not speak of Jesus, as he was, when his disciples declared their inviolable attachment to him, journeying over Judea, an outcast, without an home, not having where to lay his head. But I shall speak of him, now highly exalted, and ascended up where he was before. I might touch at his divine origin, the matchless excellencies of his nature, his glory with the father, and his grace to

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mankind.

mankind. But, omitting all these, I shall confine your views, to that one topic of commendation which the text presents, sufficient indeed, to fix our choice, and determine our adherence to him. He hath the words of eternal life. How exceedingly is this suited to sinful mortal men, such as we, born to die, condemned to die, yet breathing after life. The import and meaning of this, may be taken up in five particulars following, which I shall endeavour to illustrate.

1st, Jesus hath, with great certainty and clearness, revealed another life.

Reason, building on the inequalities to be found in the present administration, on the incorruptible nature of the human soul, and on its breathings after immortality, hath argued plausibly; but the noblest minds have found the conclusions of reason fail in the hour of trial. The dissolution of man, the departure of the soul, the wreck of the body, the sadness of a funeral, and the gloom of the grave, have given a shock, ever too violent for the principles of unassisted reason. Some, who speculated concerning the future condition of man, and these esteemed the most penetrating, have looked for an endless, comfortless, migration of souls, from one body into another. Others have flattered themselves with the mere imagined joys of Elysian fields. Pagans and Mahometans have entertained the absurd thought of a
sensual

sensual paradise; the pleasures whereof they expect to enjoy, without a body, and without senses. In the books of Moses, there is little, if any thing said, concerning a future state. The promises and threatnings found in them, primarily respect things temporal. Under that dispensation, Joshua, the judges, or the prophets, were their leaders; Canaan was their heaven: The Saviour and the salvation were exhibited, only or chiefly under types. It was reserved to Jesus, the mediator of a better covenant, established upon better promises, to make a full disclosure. 2 Tim. i. 10. He hath abolished death, and brought immortality to light, through the gospel. He himself came down out of heaven, and after being acknowledged by heaven, while here, visibly ascended up where he was before; nothing could give such an impression as this of the unseen world. He spake of it with all the weight of one having experience, as well as authority. He exhibited himself a proof and a monument of the truth which he taught. Having opened the everlasting gates leading into it, he discovered that world, as far as this was fit or needful. He hath informed us, that there is the blessedness, not merely of a place, but of a state, of a virtuous happy state; a social happiness, to be enjoyed together, where children are gathered with their fathers; an happiness, to be enjoyed in communion

with saints, with all saints, with angels, with himself, and with God, the chiefest good, the source of all bliss; an happiness of soul and body together, greatly heightened by the participation.

The doctrine of the resurrection was new and strange; but while he taught it he exhibited full evidence of it: they who were at the grave of Lazarus, and beheld what passed there; they who visited the sepulchre of Jesus on the third day, or conversed with him after he was risen; they who believe the history of these facts which were then admitted by his enemies, and which no succeeding opposition has ever been able to discredit, must discern and own that Jesus has power to raise the dead; therefore our flesh also shall rest in hope. After representing the future happiness by every figure, to heighten still more our ideas, we are assured that it is inconceivable. The reason and meaning of which is, that it is spiritual and beyond the measure of man. And more, what crowns all, enlarging the idea so as to fill every wish, we are taught, it is endless. The words of it are strictly the words of eternal life. He has given, further, an opening of the future misery of the wicked, not to terrify and affright, but to awaken and alarm. Unveiling it, that men may see at what a risk the proffered felicity is disregarded, and lest we come into that place of torment; so that nothing is wanting to
render

render his doctrine of immortality operative and powerful.

The fullness, certainty, and clearness of the gospel revelation, in regard to that, which is the ultimate and invincible desire of all, greatly recommend it; and viewing Jesus only as a teacher coming forth from God to instruct us in this point, we may well prefer him to all other teachers. Lord to whom shall we go?

2dly, Jesus has discovered how sinners of mankind may obtain a title to life.

Man, by early disobedience, incurred the penalty of death. Gen. ii. 17. In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. He was strongly debarred from hope. iii. 24. So he drove out the man, and he placed cherubims, and a flaming sword, which turned every way to keep the way of the tree of life. It must occur to every thinking person, though he had never heard the history of the fall, that all flesh having corrupted their ways are guilty before God; and from hence arise many difficulties which, like the cherubims, turn every way to keep the way of life. How shall the law of God be esteemed or revered if reward be conferred where punishment is deserved? how shall the holiness of God be vindicated, or his regard to justice venerated, if the same be the issue to the righteous and to the wicked, or if the wicked too go away into life eternal?

nal?—Reason could never solve these difficulties. Obedience, if perfect, might secure reward to the righteous, only through the favour of God, but, because imperfect, gives no claim in any case. Repentance, the after expedient, which reason commends, implies guilt and disobedience preceding it, and is itself no other than an act of imperfect obedience, and therefore without merit or efficacy. While these difficulties remain unresolved, the disclosure of life affords nothing better than a distant view, like that of Canaan anciently indulged to those who saw it from the top of Pisgah, but were never to enter that holy land. But Jesus, together with the delightful view of eternal life, hath shewed also how our forfeited title to it may be recovered. By his own perfect obedience, he has answered the full demands of God's law upon us. By his sufferings he hath expiated our guilt, having thereby satisfied justice. Thus the law is honourable. The divine holiness and justice are vindicated more effectually than if the transgressor had perished. And in all this, the faith of Jesus secures an interest to us. The blessed author and finisher of our salvation proclaimed this to the world in the name of the Father, and by his supreme authority. Ver. 40. This is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life.

If

If this scheme of heaven shall still to some appear objectionable, let vain querulous man, who would be wise, say whether he has found out any device more satisfying, to be put into the place of it. The substitution of another in order to our justification and happiness, which chiefly offends these conceited nice ones, has through the secret influence of superintending wisdom been rendered familiar to the minds of men in every country and in every age from the beginning, by the universal practice of sacrificing.—Every sacrifice is a substitution. Or if herein there be, after all, somewhat which we must acknowledge to be mysterious, it is, upon this account, but the more like the doing of the Lord. This is the express character of his way. How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!

3dly, Jesus hath pointed out the path of duty in which we are to walk, in order to our entering into life.

The very first idea of God which occurs, is that of a Ruler and Lawgiver: from whence it follows, that obedience to him is the indispensable duty of reasonable creatures, and that under the government of God, the conduct of man must be connected with his happiness. Any thing subsidiary done for him, after he has disobeyed, to recover rights he hath lost, annuls not, but heightens his obligation to duty.

What

What do ye more than others? There is a way of life in which Christians with all their privileges must ever walk. This is clearly stated in our Saviour's conference with the young man. Mat. xix. 16. 17. Behold one came and said unto him, good Master, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life. And he said unto him if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.

Reason, it must be owned, has gone farther here than any where else.—Upon subjects of moral duty, much has been said by wise men who had no other light. A few of these in ancient times, whose respected writings are come down to us, did shine in their own day like bright Meteors; their just maxims please and edify. At the same time they have transmitted nothing which can be pronounced altogether compleat. They have sadly failed in the duties of the first table; and in these of the second, their errors are not few though less gross and palpable than in the other.

Systems of a later date have been attempted, built, as the authors of them say, on mere principles of reason; and supplying, as they seem to think, every deficiency; and of these, in modern times, numbers have chosen to make a religion for themselves. But all these boasted improvements are derived from the Christian Revelation, however they acknowledge it not. Look back to ancient ages, and it is clear
from

from the records of them, that no such system as that now held forth, was ever devised by the utmost efforts of unaided human reason. Neither did any such ever appear until the Christian æra. And further, a system like theirs, has no where appeared, except where the light of the gospel has first shined, These circumstances go far to ascertain the true origin of their meliorated scheme. What they have vainly arrogated to reason, or their own penetration, they do indeed owe to Jesus of Nazareth, that man, mighty in word and in deed : Or to Saul of Tarsus, and the fishermen of Galilee, his companions, men who had letters though they never learned. Oh, what pity is it, that they have struck off and excluded that part of our gospel, which makes it a religion for fallen man ! If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do ? He may far excel the wicked, but he can do nothing to merit, or secure life to himself. Jesus is here the perfect guide, and faileth never. He shews us our title to life established : so that it cannot be again forfeited, or we miscarry in attaining life. He hath pointed out the way to it. He hath brought down out of heaven, both the tables of the law. He perfects the commandments, and enlarges our views of them. Here nothing is found that may be blamed, and nothing wanting that might be added. And the life he led in the midst of us,

is the perfect transcript of the moral institutes, which he delivered, Rev. xxii. 14. Blessed are they which do his commandments, that they may have a right to the tree of life, i. e. an interest in the right which he hath purchased, and may enter through the gate which he hath opened into the city.

4thly, Jesus communicates spiritual life, and so prepareth his disciples for life eternal.

Men are not only without a title to life till this is obtained by Jesus, but are depraved, unmeet for any virtuous felicity, and insensible to pure real enjoyment. They are justly represented as dead: here is a desperate case, incapable of cure by ordinary means. What is it, that duty is known while we can do nothing? or, that heaven is opened, when that is no heaven to us. To whom, in this sad dilemma shall we go? unto Jesus who will complete his own work, and will, with his doctrines and precepts, also give, for our relief, his holy spirit. The necessity of this was often set forth by himself, as being absolutely indispensable. This was the subject he first took up, and constantly insisted on in his public ministry. You may see this evidently in the gospel of St John, not a biographer relating the origin or the occurrences the of life and death of his master, but distinguished from the other evangelists

gelists, as recording and publishing the history of his doctrines.

Upon the subject now before us, you may read John iii. 3, 4, 5. &c. and similar passages, without number, to be found in his book. The spirit was purchased by the death of Jesus, who is head over all things, to his body the Church. He received gifts when he ascended up on high. Immediately after, when pentecost was fully come, he conferred the miraculous powers which are enumerated Eph. iv. 10. Such he bestowed upon the apostles, to distinguish the rise and establishment of our holy religion. By these it spread over Judea, triumphed over pagan Rome, and subdued the whole heathen world.

The residue and fulness of the spirit is still with him, as in a sacred repository, for us, and promised to be with true christians in his ordinary influences to the end of time. He is designed the Holy Spirit, not to signify that the attribute of Holiness is appropriated to this one Divine Person, but to denote and mark out that which is his great and special province, viz. the sanctifying them that believe. 2. Theff. ii. 13. God hath, from the beginning, chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the spirit, and belief of the truth.

The variety of his divine operations in the souls of men, furnishes the means by which their sanctification

is accomplished ; he regenerates and renews ; he illuminates and comforts ; he strengthens and confirms ; he helps their infirmities ; he guides into truth ; he cleanseth and maketh fruitful ; his fruits are manifold, sweeter, at the same time, than those of Lebanon or Carmel. Gal. v. 22 23. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. The spirit is usually communicated in his word and ordinances, which are thence termed, the means of grace. It was on the day of a great festival Jesus emitted the memorable solemn publication recorded, John vii. 37, 39. Ho ! every one that thirsteth come ye to the waters : With the spirit imparted, they are times of refreshing ; but where this is withheld, they are wells without water. As to the manner of his working, it is not to be defined ; this much we may venture to say, he operates gently though mightily, so as to incline and persuade, rather than to overpower, leaving men free and accountable, even where his agency is most effectual. As to the way of his coming, little is perceived or known. He is derived into the minds of good men without any external vehicle. The house into which he enters, is not shaken as with a rushing mighty wind. His descent is not like a dove, or like cloven tongues as of fire. But his il-lapse is still and secret, and eluding observation.

Whence

Whence, at certain seasons, arises that light which shines around me, and turns the very night into day? Whence the sudden recruit of strength or energy, which gives victory over temptation, so that out of weakness I wax strong? Whence this serenity which overspreads my soul, so that, urged hard on every side, I yet have all and abound? Whence is my depressed mind at once erected and exhilarated with joy unspeakable, and full of glory? Whence these sensible feelings, as it were, of a divine presence, and these ardours of devotion, which make my very heart and flesh cry out for the Living God? Whence blazeth the divine law as a lamp and a light upon my path, so that I hold on my way rejoicing? Whence that secret fire which enlarges and swells and impregnates the ideas of my glowing heart, and kindles the very language of my tongue? These are not the reveries of heated imagination, but the words of soberness, confirmed by the experience of good men, though the natural man knoweth them not. Communion of this kind would be more liberal and frequent, and known by thousands more, if the spirit of God were not resisted by the unbelief of some, quenched by the impurity of greater numbers, and slighted by the indevotion of many more.

Now this it is that takes out of the way every difficulty, and whatever letteth, which indeed shews us how flesh and blood may be made to inherit a
cælestial

cælestial kingdom, which is the very earnest and pledge of the kingdom, and the beginning of that life which shall never end. By this supernatural and all-sufficient provision, the gospel stands highly exalted above the law of nature, the law of Moses, and above every law. Was there ever another besides Jesus, who, in proclaiming life, did impart it? Who, in promising life, did perform his promise? Is not the ministration of the spirit glorious? The words of Jesus are of a truth the words of life, for they do convey it.

5thly, Jesus will, in the end, confer eternal life. When all others have deserted, and the heart fails within, Jesus will not forsake us. Psal. xlviii. 15. For this God is our God, for ever and forever. He will be our guide, even unto death. At death, the human frame is dissolved into its constituent parts. The soul, however, is indissoluble, and therefore immortal. The spiritual life also, or the principle of it, the new creature, is born of God, and therefore also is immortal. Jesus receives the spirits of his people, in the very moment of departing. While yet friends are doing the last melancholy offices, while they shut the dim visionless eye, and stretch the pale corpse, their spirits are with him in paradise. They are gathered unto him, as they were redeemed, from the four winds. They flock unto him, from every quarter. Our kindred are
there:

there : There are those with whom we sat at last communion table, but who have since left us behind. Rev. vii. 9. Lo ! a great multitude, which no man can number, stand before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands. Thus, the spirits of the just never taste death. Unto them, it is, as it were, no death. The most strict and best description of it, is that found, John viii. 51. If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death. They are absent from the body ; present with the Lord. There is no space or interval between.—The body, indeed, hastens to corruption ; friends are glad to bury it out of their sight ; but even over it, the triumph of death is neither complete nor final O Death, where is thy sting ? The spirit being gone, the body is insensible of thy pains and horrors. O grave, where is thy victory ? Thou art but the repository of the ashes of the dead ; they that go down into thy dark regions, are therein prisoners of hope. Jesus will raise them up at the last day. He said unto them that lamented over the daughter of Jairus, Mark v. 39. Why make ye this ado and weep, the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth ? And in like manner, to the disconsolate sister of Lazarus, John xi. 23. Thy brother shall rise again. And he had said of his own body, in defiance of all his enemies. In three days I will raise it up ; which was done
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with power. So that death is, in a manner, no death, even to the body, the earthly part of his disciples.

These observations explain to us, his glorious declaration, and serve to show, that in emitting it, he had a respect at once to soul and body, John xi. 25, 26. I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth, and believeth in me, shall never die. Death is then swallowed up of life: The darkness is past into eternal day; Arise, shine, for thy light is come.

After death is the judgment. Then shall all and every one, in his complete nature, stand before the tribunal of Jesus. The Son of Man shall sit upon the throne of his glory: None else is judge but he. Matth. xxv. 34. Then shall the king say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you, from the foundation of the world. And these shall go away into life eternal. The plaudit is followed by the event. He speaketh, and it is done. The very words of his mouth fix them in a state of unalterable life and bliss, where there is no more death or sorrow. Lord, these are the words of eternal life.

In the way of conclusion. Be persuaded to imitate the holy apostles of Jesus. Indulge the breathing after life and happiness, natural to every mind.

mind. Know that a guide to it is, in this land of darkness, necessary to all. Be persuaded to embrace Jesus as your guide, and give to him that preference which is in every view rational. Why should he complain of you as he once did of his countrymen, ye will not come to me that ye might have life?

Worldliness, sensuality, dissipation, and incredulity will deceive and mislead you. Whatever your acquisitions in a present world be, and however great your attachment to it, you must leave it. However much you may relish the pleasures of sense, with whatever desire you may desire them, or wallow in them, you must put off the body, with its senses, the springs of all this enchantment. However you may lightly squander your time and opportunities in gay amusements, sporting them away like children in the market place, the world will pass away with the fashion thereof. You may open your ear which you have shut against Jesus, to the reasoning or ridicule of the scorner, but his imperious and rash words are inconclusive, mere vanity. The folly of fools is deceit. If you slight this true guide, or are led away from him, what shall be the end with you! when you are called upon to pay the debt of nature, which all must pay, and when the desire of life shall work in you more powerfully than ever, then not life but death, the abhorrence of nature, the second death, shall be

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your dreadful portion; you must depart into everlasting destruction.

Every thing respecting you hereafter, and through eternity, is to be determined now. The question is put, and to receive an immediate reply, Will ye also go away? Hasten to form the important resolution while life and death are yet before you. Improve the advantages of a divine religion and of a heavenly guide to secure those interests which in a little will be your all. If it seem evil unto you to follow Jesus, chuse for yourselves another whom you will follow. Disgrace him not by seeking to make him only a last resource. John x. 27. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me. And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand. I am the way and the truth and the life. John xiv. 6.

SERMON . IV.

ON THE REST THAT REMAINETH TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD.

HEB. IV. 9.

There remaineth therefore a Rest to the People of God.

IT is the great excellence of the gospel that therein life and immortality are brought to light. This furnishes the best motive to constancy and perseverance in duty; the best cordial to support under distress; and the most powerful antidote against the fear of death. True indeed it is, while we are chained down to this earth, and see the other world through these casements of clay which intercept our view, we can know but little of its real nature. Even an Apostle, upon his return from the third heavens, whither he had been translated by blessed vision, was able to communicate nothing to us. What he had seen was ineffable, and somewhat that could not be uttered. Two particulars there are, however, which distinguish the gospel. That it has

made the capital interesting point certain, that there is a future endless state of happiness awaiting good men after the present shall be over: and further, that it hath explained the nature of the future bliss as clearly perhaps as spiritual things can be revealed to us. Of all the figures which are, with great condescension, used to bring down the great subject to our apprehension, there is none more affecting than this in the text, where it is called *a Rest*. Other descriptions of that future state set it off as good and excellent in itself: but this as also especially suited unto us; as cloathing to the naked, or food to the hungry, so rest is sweet to the labouring man. With the comfortable hope of this, the sacred writer in this context encourages the Hebrews; and that he might confirm their belief of it, he goes with great propriety to the Old Testament oracles, which had been committed of old to their fathers, and had long been the standard of their faith. He brings to their remembrance the words of David in the xciv. Psalm concerning *a Rest*. Remarking that these words might not be interpreted of the rest of the Sabbath, which was as old as the creation: neither of the rest of Israel in Canaan, in which land, after a pilgrimage of forty years, they had now dwelt for a long period of time; nor of any rest they already enjoyed:—He infers, that the words of the Royal Prophet must respect *a Rest* that still remained

maintained, of which these others were figures and emblems: and that could only be an heavenly rest.

This great object is no longer the mere desire of nature, or the nice deduction of human reason from litigated principles, or the ingenious conclusion of the mind from Oracles of dubious meaning, hard to be understood. It is unveiled to us in the doctrines and promises of the gospel, and ascertained by the mediation of him who is the resurrection and the life. The hope of Christians is an anchor sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil.

In the following discourse it is proposed, relying on divine aid,

I. To illustrate the proposition in the text.

II. To subjoin a short application.

I. Then it is proposed to illustrate the interesting proposition in the text, and treat shortly of the rest which remaineth to the people of God.

I. When it is said there remaineth a rest to the people of God, we are given to know that this is not to be enjoyed here in this present world, but hereafter in another.

Earth is a place fit enough to accommodate us, whilst we pass through it as pilgrims on a journey, But every thing teaches us this is not our home;—and the unquiet condition of man on earth calls upon us to look beyond it for our rest. Here, as the

Preacher

Preacher said, is vanity of vanities; all is vanity. If we are denied the comforts of life, this is matter of uneasiness and pain; if these are supplied in abundance, this doth but expose us the more to suffer by the abuse or loss of them; if we have no troubles besides, we create them to ourselves, as the spider spins the web from its own bowels; all things around are full of labour, and the world is like the troubled sea, where storms and tempests never cease to beat. What we see confirms the lesson of the text, and reads it again to us, that our rest remaineth, and is to be looked for hereafter. Heaven is the pure region, where only it can be enjoyed. There all is calm and serene, and no waves ever dash. The Prophet happily resembles it to a sea of glass.

The world itself, by two obvious circumstances, calls upon us to look forward, saying to every enquirer after rest, "It is not with me." The two circumstances are, the narrowness and the instability of the world.

Might we suppose this world did contain all the comfort and quiet which is not to be found in it, yet is it too narrow and confined to be a place of rest; and God could never have designed it for that purpose. One generation passeth away and another succeedeth, because it can contain only one at the same time. Where are now our fathers? They have
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left the stage to us who now fill it. We also shall quickly follow, leaving it to our children; and they must follow us quickly, leaving it to a race which shall be born. But heaven is a large and spacious country, fit for the general rendezvous, the heaven of heavens. There is the Father's house of many mansions. Besides,

The world is unsettled and unstable, and every thing in it passing away denies us an home of rest. We have read concerning the children of Israel, that during the forty years they did wander in the wilderness, their raiment waxed not old upon them. That was by miracle; one single instance to which no parallel is found in all the records of history. In the wilderness of this world, all things wax old. The means of life, earned with much care and toil, perish in the using. Our bodies, notwithstanding all the recruits and nourishment they receive, hasten to dissolution. The things around, in which much of our comfort may be placed, go to quick decay. The earth itself, upon the face of which we dwell, is fleeting; like Jonah's gourd, it may shadow us for a day, but the worm consumes, the wind blasts, and the heat withers it. The heavens over our head shine with admirable splendour, declaring the glory of the Creator, and shedding forth upon his creatures benign influences innumerable. Yet is endless duration none of their properties.

O Lord

O Lord thou shalt change them, and they shall be changed. The Patriarchs and all good men of former times confessed that they were pilgrims and strangers here, and walked by faith. However the ultimate object of faith, the substance of things not seen, is our rest, because as it is a spacious, so it is also a permanent habitation: not a tent; not a tabernacle to be moved, but a city to dwell in, which hath foundations. Our Lord who hath gone up and entered in for us, hath said in my Father's house are many mansions—many, signifying its boundless extent; and mansions, denoting, as the expression imports, places of fixed residence.

2. In illustration of the proposition in the text, it is to be observed that the term *Rest* used to describe the future felicity of the people of God, implies a release from whatever gives disquiet, that is, from all labour, and from all trouble or suffering.

(1.) The heavenly rest to be looked for, signifies a release from all labours, both in the business of life, and in the work of salvation.

It is a final release from labour in the business of this life. The marks of the first curse remain visible upon the face of this earth, which brings forth briars and thorns. Hence it is the lot of most of Adam's posterity, like himself, to eat bread in the sweat of their brows. Now all that shall cease in heaven. The body shall there be no more subject

to decay, and so shall need no more recruits. As scripture has beautifully represented it, They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, but the Lamb shall feed them, and lead them unto fountains of living water.—Further, It is a final release, as from labour for the bread that perisheth, so also from labour for the bread of life. Various are the necessary duties of a Christian in the business of religion; and many the circumstances which render these arduous and difficult; whilst a dead heart, and sometimes a reluctant mind, press us down, and indispose us for them. There are before us an incumbered path, and a strait gate; a hard race, with many things ready to beset us; an hazardous warfare to be maintained against ourselves, against spiritual wickednesses, and hosts of darkness, wherein is no prize or crown except to conquerors. But in heaven all labour of this kind terminates. Many of the offices incumbent on us now, in which we must exert ourselves with fear and trembling, there cease to be duties. We shall not there need to pray with strong crying and tears, because we can experience no want; not to watch, where danger is over; not to fast, because the bridegroom is with us; not to repent, when there is no sin; not to run, because the course is finished; not to fight, when palms of victory are in our hand; not to exercise faith and hope, because all is become enjoyment;

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not to seek communion with God in ordinances, or with an absent Saviour by symbolical acts, because we are admitted to immediate presence, and shall be for ever with the Lord. There are indeed certain duties, from which there is, and can be, no discharge: such as charity, with the tribe of virtues it contains. These abide; not to be any longer a painful labour, but our exercise and our joy for ever, serving to refine and improve our nature, and advance our ever encreasing felicity. We shall join with understanding in the congratulatory exclamation which the prophet of old overheard; Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth, yea, saith the spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and shall take up with extacy yet unknown, the emphatic sequel of the divine benediction, "and their works do follow them."

(2.) The term *Rest*, to be looked for in heaven, implies also a release from all trouble and suffering. The world in which we live is the dwelling of misery, and woes without number inhabit it; all is an howling waste, where briars and thorns grow up. Man here is born to trouble: his days are full of trouble: it waits on every age from tender wailing infancy to decrepid years, and on every state from that of the king on the throne to that of the meanest subject. Goodness and virtue are noble supports under trouble, but no security against it. No flesh
living

living is wholly exempted from it. The patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and martyrs were, next after Jesus, the greatest sufferers we read of.

The sources of trouble to the human race are so many that no compleat catalogue of them can be given. They proceed from God when he lays his hand upon us, or his terrors make us afraid. They come from our brethren, who oppress, injure, and cruelly treat us, often without a cause: from the persecution of enemies and the unfaithfulness of friends. Or they arise from ourselves: the seeds are in our frame. Diseases and pains are incident to the outward man; and to them we must add these incident to the mind, the vexation and anguish, the fears and misgivings of the heart within, and what is most of all insufferable, the agony of a wounded spirit. Trouble arises not altogether from what is frail or faulty in the human constitution, but in great part from what is most delicate and lovely, from the tender affection of sympathy. Our feeling for others converts their woes into our own. Were the hedge of God planted around us on every side, so that we were strangers to personal distress, here is an exuberant fountain of woe in the distresses of others; in which compassion involves us, and of which we must partake. There are national calamities when public judgments are gone abroad, and growing depravity omens the impending ruin

of our country. There are the distresses of the church of God when persecution arises; in the raging of which, unnatural strife extinguishes love; and faith fails. There are the sad disasters of our own families, when God is making breaches in them, and seems to have written bitter things against us, and our household. If we take a wider survey, and cast our eyes around upon our brethren, what objects of compassion occur amongst these made of one flesh to dwell with us on the face of the earth! How many come abroad urged by necessity to beg an alms! How many sigh at home in silent want! How many are in torments, racked with sore pain! How many are on death-beds, distracted by the struggle of contending passions; longing, yet at the same time dreading to depart! How many are in bonds and hard confinement! And what is worse than all, How many are led captive by Satan at his pleasure, despising the only Saviour, and with a blind infatuated obstinacy making their own damnation sure! Sore did pious David mourn, because men kept not the law of God. Jesus wept over Jerusalem, when he beheld its approaching desolation, presaged by many awful signs, but especially by the horrid wickedness prevailing in it, which exceeded all description. Scenes of this kind presenting themselves to us must wring tears from our eyes. Nay, men have something within which inclines them to press

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near to objects of distress, though with the viewing them pain is inseparably connected. My heart, my heart, it is melted in the midst of my bowels.

In this land of sorrows, how delectable is the view of rest; a deliverance from all these troubles of every kind and name. In that future state our days of mourning shall be accomplished. There, in the holy mountain, is nothing to hurt or destroy. God shall no longer inflict pain upon his creatures, either in judgment or for trial, but make all his glory to pass before them, and fill their hearts with joy. There will be no oppression from others; when all saints are of the same communion, and one in him. There will be no evil of any kind incident to soul or body. As we shall suffer no more ourselves, we shall share no longer the sufferings of others; around us shall be no longer sights of woe to shed a melancholy. The church shall be triumphant. The communities of all the upright shall form one undivided empire, The kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. Private as well as public grounds of grieving shall cease. There shall be no disease or pain; the inhabitant shall not say he is sick: No poverty to afflict, where the rich and poor are set down together, having all in common: No sin, the source of every evil, where all are priests to God: No hands to hang down, or feeble knees, where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest. At that
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blest period, when all the possible sources of misery are dried up, there will be fulfilled the rapturous effusion of the antient prophet, *Is. xxxv. 10.* And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. If ever, from that peaceful land, we cast an eye backward upon this valley of tears, it will be only to enhance our rest.

3. The term *Rest*, by which the future bliss of the people of God is defined, implies that it is full and perfect.

The release from every evil opens to the weary and heavy laden a pleasing prospect; yet if to the saints escaped from all these, there be supposed to remain any want unsupplied, or any good thing unattained, the sense of this would create a secret uneasiness. It might be said of them they were delivered, but not that they were at rest. It is the vanity of this world and its bewitching pleasures, that though we possess ever so much, there is a craving for somewhat we have not, which mars our happiness. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing; and when a remaining rest is held forth in the divine promise, we are by the very expression encouraged to expect a state of enjoyment free from this disquieting embittering circumstance, and having the peculiar quality

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ty of filling the soul in all its unbounded desires, without leaving room to wish for more. Should we think to run out here, or go into particulars, thought would fail, and language misgive us. Scripture favours not the attempt. At the same time that it teaches us to conceive very highly of the happiness of heaven, it checks and forbids all curious prying into things too high for us, telling us 1 Cor. ii. 9. Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. However, by the small glimpse sparingly indulged in the oracles of revelation, every thing appears ravishing and delightful. The place of abode is not merely great and undisturbed, but beyond description beautiful and splendid. Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of the great King. The society also is transporting, fitted to refine, and to exalt by participation, every pleasure. It is the communion of all saints then our fellow citizens, and of the household of God, wherein the great multitude which cannot be numbered, are knit together in bonds of inviolable amity, love circulating from heart to heart.—No enemy there, where nothing enters that hurteth or defileth, but many who had been such turned into friends, united to us by the inviolable bond of perfectness. There are our friends by relation or by covenant, more loving and more beloved mutually
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when that which is perfect is come. We had entered into their woes which then are past, we had mingled our tears with theirs, which then are wiped from their eyes and ours. We shall then be sharers with them in their joys only, and in their songs of Zion. There are the angels which excell in strength. These ministered to us when we were heirs of salvation, and will with joy finish their ministration by investing us in the rich inheritance. They rejoiced at our conversion, and will, with higher transports, solemnize the day of our complete redemption. We will come to Jesus, blessed forever, not only precious in our eyes by beauties uncreated, but endeared to us by obligations inestimable, and which no other could confer. He loved us when we were sinners, how much more will he love us when we are saints, bearing his express image! And what will then be the pledges of his love! Happy indeed the day when he shall see in our salvation, of which he is author and finisher, the travel of his soul; and we shall see in his excelling glory, the reward of his humiliation and sufferings for us. In fine, we come to God, and this is the circumstance which crowns all; for he is the great origin of bliss and perfection. Other creatures cannot fully satisfy; they are the mediums and conveyances of all good which all, in their several degrees, have derived from him, who is the great inexhaustible source, and fountain of all
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good. If even the light of his countenance, darted through the clouds that are round about him, can give such joy to the heart as his saints have experienced, what must it be to have these rays in all their undiminished brightness continually beaming on the soul! There is nothing which we can imagine wanting to them who, discharged from the many woes of life, and put in possession of their good things, do besides enjoy him in whom is all fulness: this surely must suffice. They may take their quiet rest, who are able to say The Lord is our portion.

In fine, 4. This further is implied, when the future bliss of the people of God is defined a Rest, that it is eternal. If ever their happiness was to terminate, if ever their labours and sufferings were again to commence, and the great gulf to be re-passed, the apprehension of that period would eat out the joy of the paradise of God. The prospect of it, at whatever remote distance, would blast all their felicities, so that, however great and many, they could give no rest. It is the vanity of all things below, and of every earthly delight, that they perish in the using, and the fashion of this world passeth away: and it is the being secured against this that makes heaven a rest. It is so because of its perfect plenitude, which is such as leaves no wish for more, and satisfies all the desires of the improved and enlarged capacities of the soul; and because of its du-
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ration, which is without end. As there is no fear of coming short, which in this life engenders melancholy, so no fear of losing what we once possess: neither will the enjoyments ever fail, like these of earth, by creating satiety, and so cease to be what they are: nor will they terminate and so cease to be at all. In his presence there is fulness of joy, and at his right hand there are pleasures evermore. The saints of God shall enjoy all that is sweet and delectable without any thing to allay their felicity; and that for ever. Days and months and years may pass on like a shadow and be gone: but their revolutions take nothing from the happiness of heaven, which after all is entire, and ever to begin. These are the measures of earth, and by them are reckoned all present enjoyments which fleet away as they do, and perish with them; but they cannot apply to the good things in store, when time shall be no more. Of that which is infinite there are no parts or divisions of any kind, by which it may be computed. Time shall be swallowed up in eternity, and his people shall be for ever with the Lord.

The particulars laid before you explain our text, and every other text that respects the same subject. These strictures are the substance of all that is contained in the sacred oracles, and of all that divine wisdom has thought meet to reveal to us in a present state. Hereafter the veil which hangs over
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things invisible shall be drawn aside: we shall no more see through a glass darkly, but face to face. New inlets of truth and new capacities of enjoyment, with full communications suiting them, will make known what is now unutterable, and the increase of knowledge will perfect our bliss. Happy are they who have already gone into this Rest; and happy the people to whom it remaineth, who treading in the steps of the saints already glorified, shall be gathered to their fathers in peace.

The great Christian doctrine now treated, is useful for many important purposes, upon which I might enlarge. It shall at this time suffice to apply it to one, viz.

To the purpose of comforting them who lament the decease of pious friends or relations. Indeed this is one of the heaviest calamities we know, which the best hearted feel the most. It is grievous, striking, and pungent. It will extort a tear, and must be allowed one. If there be a time under the sun for weeping, this is it; only what you have heard teaches us that our sorrow must not be immoderate. We may not sorrow like them that have no hope, and like Rachel when she would not be comforted. They have entered into their Rest. On their account there is ground of joy, and it would be interested and ungenerous to weep only for ourselves. They shall never return to us, but

if we are faithful and stedfast as they have been, we shall go to them. The melancholy parting is by no means final. When the coat of many colours which Jacob had prepared, was brought to him all torn and besmeared with blood, the tender parent's heart was pierced through, and he said, Gen. xxxvii. 3. "It is my son's coat, some wild beast hath devoured him; and he rent his garments and put sackcloth on his loyns, and mourned for Joseph many days." But had the patriarch known the real case, that the favourite child whom he counted to be lost was safe, and that he was seated next to Pharaoh's throne, that in a future famine he might be the instrument of saving his father's house, his tears would have quickly been dried up. In like manner we might be inconsolable, did we think that when we had laid our friends in the grave, they are for ever no more. But when, by the report of the Gospel, credited upon the fullest evidence and the testimony of true and faithful witnesses, we know and believe that they are alive and live for ever, that their spirits are with God in paradise, set down with him upon his throne, and that their flesh also resteth in hope, only waiting the resurrection; upon their account there is the most solid ground of triumph, and we should be ashamed to wail upon our own account. When our blessed Lord entered into the house of Jairus, then the house of mourning, he ministered

ministered comfort in these memorable words, Mark v. 39. "Why make ye this ado and weep? the damsel is not dead but sleepeth." The same may be used with more propriety than is usually thought, concerning every saint called hence by death, He is not dead but sleepeth. In strictness of speech, our dead have not so much died, as they have ceased to die. Gloomy unto all flesh are the avenues of death, and dreary the passage through that dark valley, in the near prospect of which the most fearless and intrepid tremble: but all that was terrible here, is to them who have died in the Lord, already overpast. We shudder all dismayed in the view of that conflict which yet none of us can shun: but they are already conquerors; and having palms in their hands, at this moment while we describe their state, they are shouting for victory. Wearisome days and nights may yet be appointed for us; but to them is no dark cloud to overcast or diminish the brightness of their eternal day. We lay our wearied heads upon our pillows of thorns; these are our resting places, while we sojourn in a strange land: but they have finished their pilgrimage, and reached their home, and sleep in Jesus. He who wept for Lazarus, who shed his precious blood for us, is touched with the deep feeling of our infirmities, upon these sad occasions, when we are bereaved and ready to succumb. He has the keys of death,

death, and would for our relief bring back again our dead; but interpositions of this kind would disturb the everlasting bliss of them that are at rest. They would by no means suit the frailty and infirmity of our present state, and other ends of his wisdom unknown to us prevent them. Yet though miracles are not wrought that might overpower our weak minds, he leaves us not comfortless; he opens up to us the great plan of his providence now going on, and lets us in to the concluding scene of it; he points out a future happy immortality into which he is gathering his elect, as they leave this earth, and assures us that our dead rest from their labours. This is the most abundant source of consolation; the anchor of the soul sure and steadfast. Wherefore comfort one another with these words: There remaineth a rest to the people of God.

S E R M O N V.

ON THE REWARD OF ABOUNDING IN THE WORK OF THE LORD.

I COR. XV. 58.

*Therefore, my beloved Brethren, be ye stedfast, unmove-
able, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for-
asmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in
the Lord.*

THERE is not to be found in all scripture, a piece of more beautiful reasoning, than that which is presented in this chapter; the subject is the resurrection of the body and an eternal state, a subject beyond all others, interesting; and the manner of prosecuting it is striking and elegant. The reader must here discover, at once, the natural and supernatural gifts of the inspired author; the christian and the scholar; the disciple of Gamaliel and the Apostle of Jesus. The words of the text are the conclusion of the whole matter; they contain a practical exhortation, fetched in the way of inference from what had been so fully and finely discussed;
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addressed in the most condescending and affectionate style to the Christians at Corinth. The Apostle lays aside the authority to which he was justly entitled; steps down to the level with those he had converted; bespeaks them as brethren; and, in place of commanding, beseeches them in the bowels of love. Therefore, my beloved brethren, &c.

The terms here used are abundantly plain, and seem to require no explication, beside what will more conveniently fall in, as we proceed in the discourse: and the method I would observe in handling this subject is, 1st. To explain the duty to which we are exhorted in the text. 2dly, To illustrate the argument here used to enforce it. 3dly, To consider the propriety and force of the inference, or, in other words, to show that the prospect of a future reward here pointed at, should determine us to be steadfast and unmoveable, abounding in the work of the Lord.

I. The first thing, then, is to explain the duty to which we are exhorted in the text, Therefore my beloved Brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. And the subject of this, you will notice, is the work of the Lord. It is to be distinguished from those exhortations which respect faith, or the profession of it; such as that given to the Heb. x. 23. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith, without wavering.

vering. This supposes faith as the root and source, and requires the fruits of it, and is more nearly parallel to that of 2 Peter i. 5. Add to your faith virtue. It is farther to be noticed, carefully, that the Apostle cannot be understood to speak of popish penances, and pilgrimages. All these tasks and heavy burdens imposed by priests, received and groaned under with a voluntary humility, are the works of dark superstition. Who hath required these things at your hand?—He does not here speak of that bustle which has at all periods arisen from the different sects and parties into which the church has been divided: that compassing sea and land to make a proselyte, and persecuting whom they cannot convert; that strife, contention, and debate, which are evil, the works of a blind zeal, the works of the flesh, and not the work of the Lord. That is the work of the Lord, which he himself requires: what is here demanded, is the honest service of one who with an unprejudiced mind, a candid heart, and a care which spares no pains, has enquired after the will of God, and strives to keep his statutes and to do them. In general, this respects the observance of all divine institutions; the exercises of piety; the acts of mercy and charity; and whatever is prescribed in the business of self-discipline and mortification; all our labour in the work of salvation; and our earnest well meant endeavours for the salvation

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of others. All this Jesus has commanded us to do. He is ready to furnish us with his grace for the discharge of this duty; and has bound himself by immutable promises to reward it. With reference to this work of the Lord, the subject of the Apostle's exhortation, two things are enjoined.

1st, That we be uniform, constant, and steady in it. This is included in these words of a like import, both here used, to express the same thing more emphatically. Be steadfast, unmoveable. When men are in a favourable mood, and pleased with themselves; they are also pleased with God and their duty. They chuse his testimonies as their heritage, and the rejoicing of their heart. When disappointments, losses, ill treatment, or vexation has cooled the heart to the world; then God is their rock, the most high God their redeemer; "nay, and they will serve him." When they have gone up into the mount, and turned their back upon the world, in their holy solemnities; they see things in a just view: their purposes are serious and wise. And yet the good mood is no sooner over, and the present circumstances but a little varied, than they are quite other people. Their hearts are not right with God; they are not steadfast in his covenant. "Their goodness is like the morning cloud, and the early dew which passeth away." In opposition to all this, which is too common, the apostle will have

us to be stedfast in the work of the Lord: not to confine it to times and seasons; not to mind it only by fits and starts; but to make it the business of life; to prosecute it invariably, as far as the frailty of the present state will permit; to occupy it as carefully and uniformly as one would do a wordly calling, in order to succeed in it. He prescribes to us a service proceeding from a fixed principle of duty, and not depending on mutable changing circumstances, or fickle varying humour.

Be ye stedfast, unmoveable: this last word signifies that, as we are not of our own accord to desist from this work, neither are we to be discouraged, driven, or seduced from it, by the force of temptation. The word supposes, that it must needs be, that temptation come; and implies, that we are to quit ourselves like men, and make a stand for God. To hold fast the profession of our faith when this is reputable, and we have no enemies, is hardly praise worthy; do not even hypocrites the same? But when persecution ariseth, when we are called to contend earnestly for the faith, and to strive resisting unto blood, not counting our life dear, then to stand in the evil days; this shows we are rooted and grounded. This is the faith and the patience of the saints. In like manner to adhere unto the practice of religion, when there is nothing to lead another way, is no high attainment; who is there

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that will not go this far? But when temptation cometh, to withstand it, to persist and hold on our way, in spite of difficulties, and opposition, argues a good and well established heart. When the wicked are in power, and the righteous who will not bow before them, perisheth; when pleasure comes within our reach, and with many fair speeches enticeth us to yield; when gain may be come at by a small and unobserved injustice, and seems ready to drop into our hand, if we will only step a little aside; when the heart is besieged by enemies, and the wiles of the devil practised; in these, and the like circumstances of trial, to maintain our integrity, is the satisfying proof of solid virtue, and of prevalence of grace within.

We must be thus steadfast and unmoveable in the work of the Lord, to the very close of life. This is absolutely necessary to entitle us to the reward. By apostacy the fruit of our labour is lost; it is in vain. The precept here speaks to us, like other similar precepts in scripture, every day; not minding how we stand disposed; making no allowance for seasons and circumstances. And it will speak to us while we have ears to hear. Death is the only term that can set us free from this work of the Lord. Till that hour of rest come, we must be steadfast and unmoveable in it.

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2dly, The precept further requires, in reference to the work of the Lord, that we abound in it.—A life led without any remarkable or shocking miscarriage, and a decent regard maintained to whatever we know to be the will of God, is far from being the whole that is here required.—We are called to purpose, and to accomplish much beyond this; to abound always in the work of the Lord, and as it is elsewhere expressed, to grow in grace. It must be our care to become daily more and more disengaged from sin, till, like Zacharias and Elifabeth, we walk in all the statutes and commandments of the Lord blameless. We are to attempt more for the honour of God, designing to make his praise glorious, and more for the aid and relief of our brethren; careful not to omit whatever may promote their spiritual and eternal interests, offering up ourselves for the sacrifice and service of their faith; searching out the cause we know not; seeking, like Dorcas, to be full of good works. We are to double our industry in the business of our salvation; giving all diligence to add to our faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity, that these things may be in us and abound. All this, and whatever else our hand findeth to do, we are to do with our might, heartily

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as unto the Lord; striving, wrestling, and stirring up the grace of God that is in us.

The precepts of the divine law open up for us a wide field. There is much to be done at home, upon our own account; and much to be done abroad for the benefit of others, ere we are able to say, all these have we kept; I have seen an end of all perfection; but thy commandment is exceeding broad.—The patterns in scripture are far above us. We are outstript and left behind by these faithful and true servants of the ages past, who have now rested from their labours, and whose works have followed them; whose faith we are called to follow, considering the end of their conversation. We may not once speak of a comparison with the greater examples proposed in the gospel. Are we perfect as God is perfect, and pure as he which hath called us is pure? Nay, have we yet accomplished any thing corresponding to our singular encouragements, to the grace conferred, and the glory promised us? Have we yet laid hold on eternal life, whereunto also we are called? Or done what is requisite to secure the comfort of well grounded assurance? As there is much to be done, scope for all our endeavours; so the time for working is short; the day is far spent, and the night approaches. Can we say, when our soul is departing, as Jesus said, when that righteous one bowed his head and gave up the Ghost,
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of the work which his father had given him to do. It is finished. Now the apostle will have us to double our zeal, to quicken our progress, and exert a continued ardour in the work of the Lord; alway abounding in it; and to persist, not wearying in well doing, to the very last; keeping the works of Jesus to the end; holding fast till he come, that the Son of Man may receive us at length as he did the church of Thyatira, and with the same happy plaudit. Rev. ii. 19. I know thy works and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first. I proceed

II. To consider the reward here offered in order to enforce the duty and to engage us to be steadfast, unmoveable, alway abounding in the work of the Lord.

It is set forth in these words: Forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord. In which, 1st, you have the greatness and excellence of the reward.

He speaks not of any temporal reward to be conferred in this world. God has endowed man with liberty, and leaves him to use it without imposing any force upon him. The righteous have never, in the literal sense, inherited the earth, and probably never will. This is no part of the scheme of providence, so far as we are able to penetrate into it. A
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bare subsistence, the secret testimony of a good conscience, the joy of hope and peace in the latter end, are the only present doury of virtue. The promises all point forward to another state. There, verily, there is a reward for the righteous; and unto this the apostle directs our thoughts, when he says, your labour is not in vain in the Lord. The expression evidently imports, that their labour shall be amply rewarded. It is similar to another phrase of the same kind in the x. 5. His grace, which was bestowed on me, was not in vain; which the apostle immediately explains in the following words: But I laboured more abundantly than they all.

The felicity of another world commences the moment that we make our exit out of this. The pangs of death are the end of our sorrows. This awful period finishes our labour, and travail under the sun; and terminates our conflict; here begins the reaping time of the righteous. Rev. xvi. 13. Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth; yea saith the spirit, that they may rest from their labours, and their works do follow them. The soul of the just, escaped from toil and misery, is, from the moment of dissolution, with his Lord in paradise. While the last breath yet lingers on the quivering lip, Christ Jesus receives his departing spirit; while the deceased is carried to his long home,
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and the mourners are going about the streets, the soul is above the regions of sorrow. We have a beautiful description of the servants of God, and it will apply to them how soon they have put off the body. Heb. xii. 22, 24. Ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels: To the general assembly and church of the first born, which are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant. When the sleep of death falls upon the faithful servant of Christ, and surviving friends close, with pious duty, the eye lids; the soul awakes compleatly sanctified, and satisfied with the likeness of God. The bliss of the saint, which begins in the instant of death, continues without intermission. When dust has returned to dust, and seen corruption, when the pit has shut its mouth, when he is forgotten of all he left behind, when the place that knew him once knows him no more, when a generation, strangers to him, have arisen, and filled up the vacancies of life, his soul remains possess'd of all that can make him happy in a separate state; although a part of himself is yet detained as an hostage in the domains of death.

The apostle might have said, even with reference to this happiness, to be bestowed in an unbodied

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state, your labour is not in vain. But his encouraging words are designed to take in also, what is to be added to this at the resurrection of the body, the day, as it is called, of compleat redemption: The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall come forth; they that have done well, to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil, to the resurrection of damnation. Them that sleep in Jesus shall God bring with him. The righteous shall arise first. The soul, perfected in holiness, is united to its body, improved to an infinite degree; no more the clog of its best exercises; no more the source and instrument of fleshly lusts, but a companion meet for higher service, a fit partner of celestial bliss.

This felicity of soul and body united again upon more favourable terms, is what the apostle treats in the chapter before us, and chiefly regards, when he says, Your labour is not in vain, in the Lord. He throws out many particulars upon this subject, which may raise our ideas of it extremely high. He informs us, that our bodies shall then resemble the glorified body of Jesus, v. 49. As we have born the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly, the same with what he had taught, Phil. iii. 21. Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working, whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself. The disciples,

ciples, who witnessed the transfiguration, and said in the rapture of delight, Matth. xvii. 4. Lord, it is good for us to be here, if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; they could better comprehend what is here intended. The apostle, speaking of this resemblance, surely remembered that glory which shined around him, when Jesus appeared to him, as he journeyed to Damascus, Acts ix. 3. and which struck him blind. He instructs us more particularly, v. 42, &c. that this corruptible, vile, frail, natural body, shall then be raised, an incorruptible, glorious, powerful, and spiritual one, v. 44. a spiritual one, i. e. full of the divine spirit, which shall not only replenish the soul, but infuse itself, in its purifying and invigorating influences, through the body; possessing the whole man, filling the saint with all the fulness of God.

How far the body, raised in glory, by the power of God, will contribute to the perfect enjoyment of a future state, it is impossible to say. What its senses shall be, or of what and how much happiness they shall be the inlets, the spirits of just men perfect, the angels in heaven perhaps do not know. All that was desiderated in a state of separation, will then be fully supplied. The saint shall then be more perfect and excellent, than in his original innocent estate, when God said, Gen. i. 26. Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. In the resurrection,

rection, he is brought to the ultimate degree of excellence. All that has been carrying on through every age by Jesus, his prophets, apostles, evangelists, and pastors, for the perfecting of the saints, receives the finishing stroke. Divine power has done its utmost, and again sees its work, that, behold, it is very good. The saint is raised to a full capacity of enjoying God, and all that God has laid up in store for them that love him, and for dwelling in a kingdom, which flesh and blood, under the attainder of sin, cannot inherit.

The saint has that life restored, which we are all so fond of, which we desire so earnestly to prolong, and for which a man will give all that he has: he has this life, not only in circumstances infinitely more favourable, but also free from decay, secure from hazard, perpetual and eternal. The last enemy is overcome, ver. 54, 55. so when, &c. Can we read or hear of this state, without feeling emotions of the most earnest and ardent desire? The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain till now; we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body, Rom. viii. 22, 23.

This is the reward by which the apostle would engage us to be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. That, however,

ever, there might remain no doubts to check our desires, and discourage our endeavours, you have further attested in these words, the certainty of the reward. Forasmuch as you know. He does not say, you conjecture; you wish or even hope; but you know; and are persuaded upon solid grounds, that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

The heathens themselves believed the immortality of the soul, or a future state, in which it should be happy or miserable. They collected many arguments for the proof of it, and laid them out with much ingenuity. But they never dreamt of a resurrection; nor once figured that man, as he now is, should be rewarded or punished. This thought lay out of the sight of reason. The first discovery of it astonished, and stumbled the wise and the disputers of the world. Acts xvii. 32. When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, they mocked.

This doctrine was not altogether unknown in the Old Testament times. Jesus argues for it with the Sadducees, who received only the five books of Moses, from the Pentateuch, Matt. xxii. 31, 32. But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have you not read, that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. God

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is not the God of the dead, but of the living. It is to be found, Psalm xvi. 8—11. and in other passages of the prophets. We find good men rising above the light of the times in which they lived, and using expressions, which would lead us to imagine, that they were favoured with particular discoveries, suiting the extraordinary trials of their lot, Job xix. 23—27.

The apostle here speaks to them who, together with the scriptures of the Old Testament, had all the additional evidence of the gospel revelation. The great argument used for the confirmation of their faith is taken from the resurrection of Jesus, ver. 3. For I delivered unto you first of all, that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures. He appeals to them that the truth of this fact was attested by great numbers of those who were with him when he rose; and who, in point of character, were above exception; by men that were no gainers by their testimony, but suffered for it, and sealed it with their blood; by his brethren, who are called the witnesses of the resurrection, as if this had been their whole charge; and by himself, of whom he says, I was seen last of all, as one born out of due time. Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, and they that
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witnessed his resurrection submit what they preach to be canvassed and sifted like wheat, how say some among you that there is no resurrection from the dead. God has confirmed the whole of what Jesus has taught concerning the rewards of another world; nay, and declared him to be his Son with power, by his resurrection from the dead.

In this event, the power of Jesus over death and the grave, is set before us in the clearest light. While he tabernacled among us he raised Lazarus; He raised the daughter of Jairus. Here he did what must persuade us more. When he was in the grasp of death, wound up in the linen clothes, anointed with the spices, fast inclosed in the sepulchre, he arose. And shall he not raise up all that God hath given him? When all power is committed unto him in heaven and earth, shall he not command the grave to give up its dead? As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive: Christ the first fruits, and afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. In the resurrection he has entered upon that kingdom which the Father hath appointed him, and v. 25. He must reign till he hath put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. He will reign till he conclude his administration by executing judgment upon all. Acts xvii. 31. He hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man
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whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

This doctrine, although so well supported, was new in great measure, and strange to the world, and likely to meet with many objections; for the solution of all the Apostle refers to the power of God, and the effects of divine power in cases common and familiar, and, at the same time, analogous to this: he refers to the harvest, as the liveliest emblem of the resurrection. The bare grain is sown, it may chance wheat or some other grain; it dies in the earth; God gives it a body, to every seed his own body. In like manner, by a progress similar to this, from bodies dead and corrupted, he raises other bodies, full bodies, celestial and terrestrial; differing, as he pleases, one from another. How should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that he who makes corn to grow, who covers the vallies with it, should also raise the dead? In the end of the world we shall see a vast harvest, where the reapers are the angels. Thus is the reward of the stedfast labour of this short life, no less certain than it is important. I proceed

III. To consider the propriety and force of the inference in the text; or, in other words, to shew that the prospect of a future reward, here pointed at, should determine us to be stedfast, unmoveable, abounding

bounding in the work of the Lord: And this will appear in a very convincing light, if the following things are attended to:

1. That this reward will be conferred upon those only that are faithful in the work of the Lord.

If it were otherwise, the apostle's whole argument would fall to the ground. Why should men be steadfast, unmoveable, abounding in the work of the Lord, if they might reach heaven by an easier road? If the confident, the careless, and secure might get thither, who would think of strivings and watchings? Such labour were indeed in vain; but whatever men's ignorance or passions have, at any time, substituted in the place of labour in the work of the Lord, is all a building of hay and stubble.—Faith itself, without works, is dead, being alone; and the gospel scheme of saving us by faith, is far from setting them aside. Tit. iii. 8. This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. There is no merit, it is true, in the best works of the best of men. This is excluded by the law of faith; when we have done all, we are but unprofitable servants. But the works of a good life, according to the opportunities severally given us, are necessary, though not meritorious. They have their own place, though they may not come into the place of

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faith; they are good and profitable unto men—Heaven is the reward of them, although not a reward of debt, but of grace. Gal. vi. 7, 8, 9. Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap; for he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well-doing; for, in due season, we shall reap if we faint not. Rom. ii. 6. He will render to every man according to his deeds.

2. This reward promised for our encouragement in the work of the Lord, will be conferred according to the measure of our diligence in this life.

There is great danger of coming short here; but no possibility of exceeding. If we are at all entitled to a reward, it will bear a proportion to our work: there will no part of our labour be in vain in the Lord. Among them that are now the inhabitants of heaven there are thrones, and dominions, and principalities, and powers; and when its mansions are farther replenished from the earth, there will still remain the like subordination. We read in the context ver. 41, 42. that there is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differeth from another star in glory; so also is the resurrec-

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tion of the dead. 2 Cor. ix. 6. But this I say, he which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. These last distinctions lie not in fancy and opinion, but are founded in something intrinsic and substantial. These places of eminence go not by birth right; they fall not a prey to the restless and bustling. Our labour in the work of the Lord will there turn to account and determine the precedency.—The best shall approach the nearest to the throne of God. That virtue which the world has persecuted and condemned, the Father which seeth in secret shall reward openly. That goodness which men have overlooked or reviled; those offices of love which a diffident modesty has concealed, will be found unto praise, and honour, and glory; these lovely characters which our Saviour distinguished upon the mount by his benedictions will there receive more conspicuous and striking marks of his favour. They that are now slothful may not rely on the merits of others, hoping to borrow of them that have been more provident and active. In vain shall they say to such, Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out. They who have gathered much shall have nothing over; every one shall receive his own work. He who is scarcely saved, and with difficulty enters into the kingdom, will see, and I dare say without a repining thought, others rising above him

to greater glory. Filled himself, in every capacity, with all the fulness of God, and witnessing the distributions of impartial Justice, his mind will be satisfied; he has all and abounds; his soul can admit no more; united to all in love, which is the bond of perfectness, he will participate the joy of all. Whether one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. The meanest faint will enjoy, undisturbed by bitterness or envy, the fruit of his labours: there is nothing without or within to hurt or destroy; but they that outstrip others will there excel.

Is there not much, in this view of a future state, to kindle our ambition and stimulate our zeal? What ought we not to do and suffer through this short life, if it may accrue to our future and eternal glory. Phil. iii. 13, 14. I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things that are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

3. They that forsake the work of the Lord, and flight this reward, cannot otherwise bestow their labour better or more profitably.

If it seems evil unto you to serve the Lord, chuse ye this day whom you will serve. Can the world merit or recompence your services better than he?

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Can it outbid him? Can it be said of those who have devoted themselves to earthly pursuits, as of the servants of the Most High, that their labour is not in vain? Is it not rather true that they have run in vain, and laboured in vain: That they have spent their money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not? There is little truth or certainty in things here, that occasion all this bustle on every side. —The most prudent and vigorous efforts are frequently abortive. Eccl. ix. 11. I returned and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill, but time and chance happeneth to them all. There is a deficiency and emptiness in all worldly good when it is attained, which we seldom look for; so that success is often the source of vexation. Our waking fancies concerning it are found as delusive as the dreams of night. But enjoyment is often unaccountably dashed with care and solicitude. The most delicate and choice of our joys here, are only the joys of a moment; the fruits of one passing season. The objects that give us the most pleasure, usually fade and decay the soonest. They are, without exception, all fleeting, and often make unto themselves wings. When we think we have them by the surest hold,

hold, the last summons is put into our hands, and there is none abiding. Such are these things here that yet continue to befool and to bewitch the children of men. To the cool dispassionate view of reason, they have little in them very tempting. But fancy produces a wonderful enchantment. Imagination catches us off the solid ground on which we stand. In a moment we are on the pinnacle of the temple, and before us the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. And are these the things for which we will labour, rather than for the felicities of another world, which are solid, certain, and permanent? These last are unseen and at a distance; but we have all the security given us for them, that is possible in the case of what is future, 1 Cor. ix. 26. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air. Will the wit of libertine arguments upon this subject, which have no weight but their stupidity, no merit beside their boldness, unsettle our minds and shake our faith? will the mere glare of present things always make fools of us, and the impatient desire of present good interfere with a sober and due concern for our better and everlasting interests? Let the world proceed in that folly which began in it early, and is like to continue while it lasts; but Lord save thou me from them which have their portion in it. He is wise, who labours for the bread
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that does not perish, who, whatever may be with him subordinate ends, yet seeks the kingdom of God first; he will be wise in his latter end. For what is a man profited, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

4thly, In fine, a regard to the happiness of another world, has been, in fact, the prevailing principle of the best and wisest men, and determined them to undergo cheerfully a life of voluntary labour and suffering.

You are not called to be the first adventurers for an invisible state; the first to rely on the security of the divine promises for what is future and beyond the grave. The worthiest men in the ages that are past, have herein gone before you. That prepossession we have in their favours, should induce us to follow them. Can we read of those eminent names collected in the 11th of the Hebrews, some of them distinguished by their great achievements, others by their great sufferings, all of them by their great virtue and wisdom, without approving their spirit? It was not ambition that covers lands with blood, and spreads desolation like a whirlwind, but the desire of better things, even an heavenly inheritance, that produced these high examples, v. 13. These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off,

off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.—Can we read without admiration of the apostles of Jesus, who from the same motive, submitted to a course of such hardships and labours through life, as remain unparalleled in history, and to death in its cruellest forms? If in this life only, they had hope, they were of all men the most miserable. The apostle in this exhortation, does not bind heavy burdens for us, which he did not himself touch, nor press us with a motive which did not outweigh every thing in his own mind.—Witness the concise journal of his own life, 2 Cor. xi. 23—29. And that which was the common spring and motive of his fortitude and patient enduring is fully set out, chap. iv. 8, 9, 10, 15, 16, 17, 18.

Do you imagine that these were all weak men, and incompetent judges of their own true interest? The influence they once had in the affairs of the world hinders you from making any such supposition. Is the resurrection of Jesus less certain now, than when they published it to the world, God also bearing them witness, with signs and wonders, and divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost? Is the resurrection of the dead, of them that sleep in Jesus, less certain than when it was first preached, and they suffered for maintaining it? Or is heaven now become less deserving of our regard than

than it once was? It is true, indeed, that even in these golden ages, all men had not faith. The bulk prosecuted schemes of safety, wealth, and pleasure, better suiting our modern and prevailing notions. What now is become of these children of this world? They were accounted wise, I suppose, in their generation. Are they so in their latter end? Where is now the fruit of their labour? Many ages are gone since their memory perished: in death there is no remembrance of them: on earth there is left no monument to tell us of their virtue or happiness: But as to the children of light, who renounced their all, and counted not their life dear for the sake of an heavenly country, they have at least obtained a good report through faith; an everlasting memorial. Being dead, they live. And if there is truth in what they preached, and we believe, they are already through faith and patience inheriting the promises. Which of the two are now the gainers? With which would we cast in our lot? With them let us be gathered, who have fallen asleep in Jesus, whom God shall bring with him. Let us follow their faith, considering the end of their conversation.

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S E R M O N VI.

PREACHED IN MAY 1780, AT THE OPENING OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE CHURCH OF
SCOTLAND.

ON THE STANDING MEANS OF RELIGION.

LUKE XVI. 31.

And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

AMONG all the discourses of our Saviour, recorded by the evangélists, there is none more striking than the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. The last and most interesting scene of it opens in the other world, where the lot of these two persons, so very different in this world, is totally and finally reversed. Lazarus is comforted and receives his good things, secured beyond the reach of evil. The rich man receives his evil things, and lifts up his eyes in hell, being in torments.

This rich man, in utter despair, having no reversion of his good things, no drop of water to cool his tongue, nothing which he might obtain or hope for

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himself,—is represented as becoming intercessor for his surviving kindred, ver. 27. Then, said he, I pray thee therefore, Father, that thou wouldst send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brethren, that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.

Whether the request proceeded from compassion, if that can dwell with despair; or whether it flowed from a selfish motive, lest their undoing, to which it is likely he had been accessory, if not prevented, might be imputed in so far to him; I enquire not. Neither dwell I upon the figuring, which is strong and lively. His misery must have been intolerable, since he is persuaded that, if his brethren were only informed of what he felt, they would instantly repent, and pursue a different course. The danger of his brethren is shocking; and indeed that of all the licentious and dissolute upon earth, when, however void of concern for themselves, they are objects of pity in hell. But what chiefly merits our notice is the important instruction given in the reply of Father Abraham, for the sake of which, especially, the request in the parable, seems designed; ver. 29. They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them. Again repeated in the text, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead. Let them attend to and improve the standing and ordinary means

means of religion wherewith they are favoured; for if these are flighted, they may not reasonably hope for others; nor may they even expect, if, through the divine indulgence, others and these the most miraculous were granted, that such would prove effectual.

Here is the capital lesson of the whole beautiful discourse. This solemn declaration is to be received as from the mouth of Jesus. It conveys his will, and must be regarded as his testimony concerning the excellence and efficacy of the ordinary means of religion. The words are suited particularly to the Jews, the immediate hearers of the parable; but will apply still more emphatically to Christians, who enjoy clearer light and more distinguishing advantages. They very naturally lead me to recommend the standing means of religion with which God has blessed the Christian world. A subject which, I trust, cannot be thought unseasonable in these times, upon the present occasion, and in this very respectable audience.

There are here suggested three particulars which I shall endeavour to illustrate.

1st. The means of religion with which God has favoured us, are excellent, and, by divine wisdom, fitted to answer all the purposes of our salvation.

2d. Where the ordinary or established means of religion prove ineffectual through our fault, in this case,

case, there is no ground to expect that any thing further and extraordinary shall be done for us.

3d. If any thing miraculous were done where these means are slighted or frustrated;—suppose one came from the dead—there is little reason to think that we would be persuaded and saved.

Of these I shall attempt to speak in order, and then subjoin a short application.

I. The means of religion with which God has favoured us, are excellent, and, by divine wisdom, fitted to reform men, and to answer all the purposes of our salvation.

I go not back into ages past, or abroad into foreign countries, to investigate the mysterious ways of providence in discriminating variously the nations; but shall confine my thoughts to our own land and to the present times: I dwell not upon the privileges of the Jews, but shall consider the higher advantages of us Christians, which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God. 1 Pet. ii. 9.

I may not enter into the singular testimonies of the divine grace, by which one disciple of Jesus is distinguished from another; or touch the special blessings of them whom he chuses and satisfies with his goodness; but shall content myself with recollecting the advantages which all in common participate, who are members of the christian church.

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We have the light of nature, the law written in our heart, a conscience accusing or else excusing us, a gift not sufficiently prized, whilst yet it is all that was ever enjoyed by many nations which God made of one blood to dwell upon the face of the earth.

The early and occasional manifestations made of old to the patriarchs and fathers, were entered upon sacred record for our benefit, and are found in our scriptures. Whatever the Jews, the ancient people of God, enjoyed, hath descended to us as a birth-right, the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the promises. We have Moses, and the Prophets from Samuel unto John; these very advantages, concerning which the father of the faithful speaks here in such terms of estimation.

What is more than all, we have Jesus Christ and the full revelation of the divine will by him. God hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, saying, They will reverence my son. Let his life and history be compared with prior revelations, and with the tenor of the Old Testament; and we cannot but be satisfied that this is he which should redeem Israel, and of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets did write. He came not in his Father's name, without producing the most ample credentials of his mission. The works which he did,—miracles of mercy not less than of power,—bare witness of him

him that the Father had sent him. The scope of his doctrine to make men good and happy obviated every scruple. And to consummate all, God declared him to be his Son with power, by raising him again, and receiving him into heaven, where this first begotten from the dead sat down with power on the right hand of the majesty on high. The apostles, who published all this, were of them which had constantly companied with him: they declared to others only what they had seen, and tasted, and handled of the word of life. They shined not with the accomplishments of literature; but of their probity, a character more essential to witnesses, enough cannot be said. They were never bribed into this hard and perilous service by the prospect of gain; and indeed they reaped none, if it was not gain to quit their all and lay down their lives. They were more than men. It is said they did greater works than Jesus had done; and they could say, we are witnesses of these things, and so also is the Holy Ghost, which God hath given unto us. And what these true and faithful witnesses preached unto their own contemporaries, they have transmitted by their inspired writings to all succeeding ages, for our benefit, on whom the ends of the world are come. Their books, published in a very early period, were a fair and open challenge to their opposers, when the facts and events related
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were yet recent and fresh: asserted by friends, they stood unrefuted by enemies. Adversaries did shed their blood, but there was no more that they could do. By all the cruelties they contrived to perpetrate, they could never stain, but did exceedingly brighten their character of veracity. The New Testament penned by them was soon translated into all the different languages and passed into every hand. It was quickly transcribed into the sermons of its teachers, and into the tracts of free-thinkers; by these channels it hath come down under the joint security of friends and foes. Conveyed in this way, it could not, in the downward ages, be corrupted, without a combination of every nation and kindred and tongue, and such a collusion as it is impossible to suppose. This sacred book, then, is the very faith once delivered to the saints; every doctrine and every precept herein contained is from heaven, as certainly as if we heard it uttered with thundrings and lightnings like these of Sinai, or issuing from the opened clouds, like the audible voice which attested Jesus at his baptism.

And as the gospel has every evidence to convince the unprejudiced that it is from heaven, so it is in itself compleat, every way suiting our necessities and the purposes of our salvation. What bright and amiable discoveries of the divine nature are here exhibited by him who was in the bosom of the Father and

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came to reveal him ! What a satisfying view is given of the redemption of fallen man through the death and mediation of Jesus ! Now have mine eyes seen thy salvation. What a pure directory for divine worship is framed ! God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

What a complete system of morals is delivered ! Comprehending every duty, private, social, and religious. What examples are here to lead us by the hand ! What mercies tendered ! What cords of love to draw us. What ordinances are instituted ! Marked alike by their simplicity and significance ; containing all the power and virtue that can belong to rituals. What explicit encouraging assurances are given of spiritual aid to help our infirmities ! Grace and truth together come by Jesus Christ. Life and immortality are clearly brought to light ; heaven, a state of consummate bliss, is opened in the promises of the gospel ; and, in its threatenings, hell, a state of ripened vice and misery, with dreadful terrors, is unveiled. Let us but attend, and these things are so awfully displayed, that we shall own there is no need of any messenger from beyond the great gulf to admonish or warn us. To secure leisure to the busy part of mankind, and the necessary seasons of devout exercise to all, the Sabbath is set apart and consecrated. And suffer me to add, there is sent forth a standing ministry, and in succession, as the prophets

prophets do not live for ever ; by their pious labours in public, and from house to house, all are stirred up to mind the things that belong to their peace. The congregational service is conducted, and the truths of God are poured into every open ear, so that I may say to every one with the apostle, Rom. x. 8. The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart ; that is the word of faith which we preach.

What could have been done in the vineyard, that he hath not done in it ? Could God have sent into our guilty benighted world a greater messenger than his own Son ? Or could the Son of God from heaven have done more for the recovery of sinful men ? To enumerate all the signal advantages, which, through him we enjoy, were no easy task. Another however there is more hard, and that is, to say, what one advantage befitting us we are without. If we are ignorant of any thing which it concerns us to know, our ignorance is wilful. If we remain infidels, this must be because there is within us an evil heart of unbelief. If we continue impenitent, this is not because we are unapprized of our danger. Or if finally miscarry, and come, after all that is done to prevent it, into the place of torment, our blood is upon our own heads. Rom. i. 16. I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth ; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

I proceed now to the

II. Particular to be illustrated, That where the ordinary or established means of religion prove ineffectual through our fault, in this case there is no ground to expect that any thing further and extraordinary shall be done for us.

Men enjoying all these advantages, and valuing them the less that they are familiar and common, may indulge a vain imagination, and figure what they please: but it no ways consists with sound reason, to think that the settled method of the divine administration should be departed from, and extraordinary steps taken upon flight occasions: This is not done in the natural world, where one system uniformly takes place; and can it be looked for in the spiritual kingdom of God? Will he here descend or demean his power and wisdom? Be still and know that I am God. That frequent miracles should be wrought, suits not by any means our condition in this state of trial; if he stun us with the thunders of his power, and fright us into a virtuous course, all with us is force and necessity, not choice; we are compelled, and cease to be free. And is it to be thought the supremely wise ruler will in this way unhinge all, and turn his moral world upside down? If it still did consist with the majesty of the divine government, and the present state of men, that we should be roused by frequent miracles,

racles, and alarmed by messages from the invisible world, yet the perverse and obstinate, who most need such interpositions, have of all others the least reason to expect them. Shall the sun stand still, and the moon be stayed at their desire? Job xviii. 4. Shall the earth be forsaken for thee, and the rock removed out of his place? Yea the light of the wicked shall be put out, and the spark of his fire shall not shine.

The gospel is a scheme for reforming and saving the world, in which is provided whatever can contribute to this end, consistent with the wisdom of God to bestow, or the condition of man, as a free creature to receive. The perfection of it forbids us to look for any thing further. What is there wrong in it that should be amended, or defective that may be supplied? Where divine goodness has wrought such wonders, and in a way so accommodated to us, to ask for more were to tempt the Lord our God. If the rich man could obtain no more in behalf of his brethren, because they had Moses and the prophets, where is our ground for expectation, who possess such plenitude of grace? No hope of this kind originates from the gospel. On the contrary, every idea of it is there expressly debarred. It claims the character of the last dispensation of mercy: last of all he sent his own son. This is the last time: these are the last days: now the ax is laid unto the
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root of the trees. The providence of God is now bringing forward no other device: it seems not, as in by-gone ages, with another dispensation, the antitype of the present, and which shall succeed to it: but under this the utmost and last efforts are used; and where these are resisted there is no hope. Matt. xiii. 12. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have. We may in this case look for nothing further, if it be not fearful judgment and fiery indignation, to devour the adversary.

But leaving this, I go on to the third particular suggested by my text.

III. If any thing miraculous were done, where these appointed means are slighted or frustrated, if even one came from the dead, there is little reason to think we would be persuaded so as to repent and be saved.

It is not said that the thing is impossible: but what we mean, and what is clearly affirmed, is, that all circumstances duly considered, it is in a high degree improbable, that, where the ordinary means of religion have been resisted, a miracle, be it ever so great and striking, should prevail. And we may be satisfied that it is so, by giving a slight attention to the tempers of men, and then by investigating the matter in a few examples from life and history.

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I. Let attention be given to the tempers and dispositions of men; of these I mean, who hear not Moses and the Prophets,—who resist the ordinary means of grace; and we will readily acknowledge there is little ground to expect that such would be persuaded, even if one rose from the dead.

And here among them that resist the means of grace, come first to be considered,

Unbelievers, such as they who at this time heard Christ and derided him. If their infidelity, which is a common case, proceeds from disaffection to the precepts of the gospel, and to holiness, the end of it, to afford them more evidence, is obviously to no purpose. Nothing can be of any avail that doth not sanctify the heart. Or, admitting that evidence is wanted, which they must needs pretend, I see not how much stress could be laid on the testimony of one returning from the other world: the very sight might shock, but could not go far to convince. Are there not evil as well as good men gone to the other world, who may return? This strange visitant is unknown; the whole of what I hear and see may be delusion; a vapour appearing, or seeming to appear, then vanishing away; an apparition, fleeting, not certifying whence it came or whither it goeth. Is his bare appearing the proof of a commission from heaven, or indeed of any thing else? Would not a revelation given in this way remain
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liable to all the objections ever brought against the Gospel Revelation, and indeed to many more and much greater; is there any thing here solid, or to be compared with the evidence we have from the miracles and resurrection of Jesus, which we may examine with all composure, and weigh deliberately? And can it once be thought that they who have resisted the greater evidence will yield to that which is infinitely less?

Next to unbelievers, and second among them that resist the ordinary means of grace, are the wicked men attached to the present world, or addicted to their corrupt lusts. Now if one came to such from the dead, the utmost to be imagined is, that they would believe him. Yet what is this to their reformation, which must go before happiness? They believe Moses and the prophets, but obey them not; and would they not still retain the truth in unrighteousness, though published to them a different way? The sudden entering of the unusual ghostly messenger might produce an agitation not to be described, and leave no heart within them to sin and the world; but the violent tumult would by and by abate; their lusts, stunned rather than mortified, would gradually resume their strength, and at length repeat their urgent demands. Conviction in such a case might pierce with deeper agonies, but the wound would soon be mollified, and conscience be
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quieted again, by the soothing purpose of after amendment, or other fallacious arts of self-delusion. Go thy way for this time.

And then in the last class are they on whom the means of grace are lost through mere levity of mind, and a fatal inattention to their spiritual concerns, which, from custom has become almost natural. Though an extraordinary interposition might seem to suit those more than the others mentioned, as what they need chiefly is to be awakened; yet here in this most promising case any lasting benefit is hardly to be expected. Such a frightful unexpected visit would rouse them, and force them to think for a little: but suffer them to return to the company of the gay and frolicsome, or to their wonted bewitching entertainments, and all will quickly be forgotten. Adieu then to the pensive mood, and to whatever is serious. The like absence and dissipation of thought as before will again take place: The habit of their mind will necessarily and soon prevail against any occasional and transient emotion. The frequent past experience of men of this character may incline them to apprehend that it will be so. Have they not quaked under deep impressions of another world, while they witnessed a friend not returned from thence, but in the moment of his departure thither; while they listened to the advices from his death-bed pillow? What have they felt

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when instant death seemed to arrest themselves, and its pains get hold upon them? Yet these fears and purposes have quickly vanished they know not how, and have scarcely out-lasted the moving occasions of them. And is there any security, or one good reason to presume that the like impressions would be more permanent and enduring, if produced by a ghastly apparition, or in some preternatural way? The minds of such are light and inane, and unstable in all things. They resemble the sand on the sea shore, where prints are readily received, and sink deep; but the first flow of tide smooths and effaces all.

Thus, from a passing view of the tempers and characters of men, it would appear that it is not more evidence for religion, or any accession of other and extraordinary means, that is wanted, but better hearts to improve the advantages we enjoy, and more of the grace of God; and that, if they believe not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.

The same thing will appear more obvious still, and beyond all doubt,

2. From the examples of wicked and obstinate persons, for whom miracles have been wrought. If, in fact, they have generally continued unreclaimed, then there is little to be expected from extraordinary methods.

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There never was any ground to demand the evidence of miracles ; yet many have been wrought occasionally through the divine indulgence, that we might see this matter put to the trial, and might have the benefit of experiments to direct our judgment ; and of these examples there are upon record in scripture not a few.

We find such miracles wrought before Pharaoh, as we might well think the most obdurate sinner could not resist, but in fact he resisted them ; he sinned yet more, and hardened his heart ; he and his servants. *Exod. ix. 34.* At the desire of Saul, the prophet Samuel was brought up from the dead, an old man, and covered with a mantle : he perceived it was Samuel : he heard from him the message of the Lord : he was deeply impressed : he fell all along upon the earth, and was sore afraid. Yet by all this his heart was not softened : he was still the same frantic man as before, and so continued to his wretched end, when he desperately fell upon his own sword. *1 Sam. xxviii.* What wonders of mercy and judgment alternately were wrought before the children of Israel in the wilderness, and at their entering into Canaan ! But these had not more influence upon them than the law. They obeyed not, but made their necks stiff. In our Saviour's days, when he came unto them in person, they required a sign, and their demand was more than granted.

So many miracles and signs were wrought before them, that, if they were written every one, the world could not contain the books that should be written. But all was not enough: they became no better, but did always resist the Holy Ghost, as their fathers did, so did they. Acts vii. 51. Among other signal favours done, this here denied to the rich man was literally granted unto them. Lazarus was sent unto them from the dead: but this seemed rather to provoke their resentment, than to persuade. From that day the rulers took counsel together to put Jesus to death; and in place of believing, with a strange infatuation, they fought also to kill Lazarus, lest others seeing him alive should believe. The resurrection of Jesus was another miracle of the same sort, only greater. It specially vouched his divine commission, having been expressly foretold, and alledged as the decisive proof of it. This shewed that beside his mission to instruct and redeem, he had also power to raise the dead. Yet what better were they? After this, as before, they blasphemed his name, persecuted his disciples, and madly opposed his cause.

The soldiers who were posted at the sepulchre, and were personally present when he rose; who felt the earthquake, and saw the angel that rolled away the stone; who for fear did shake and become as dead men—These keepers, we find, in a little, and
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for a small sum of money, denied all they saw, and swore falsely against him who rose from the dead in a manner before their eyes. Unto these it is needless to add other and similar instances: As we may shrewdly conjecture from the tempers of men, so we may with confidence infer from such examples, that where the ordinary means of religion are frustrated, there miracles will also be without effect: or in the language of the text, if they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.

Having thus attempted to illustrate my subject, it only remains that I subjoin a short application.

God hath been pleased to deal with us as we are able to bear, not scaring us with visions and messengers from the other world. The means he hath devised for our eternal welfare carry upon them the most conspicuous marks of the divine wisdom. These are nobly adapted to reach the great purpose of his mercy, and well suited to the frame and condition of man. This scheme of happiness, only with a small diversity in the form, accommodating it to times, is the same which was opened from the beginning; it has been adopted and followed by the wise and sober of former generations; the excellency and efficacy of it are proved by the experience of ages that are past, and by it many sons have been brought

brought to glory. This is offered also to us, not surely to be the matter of amusement, or to furnish exercise for our ingenuity, but for an end more weighty and important, to direct us in life, and conduct us to future endless felicity. It is not for us to trifle here, or to indulge the vanity of imagination in figuring how things might have been otherwise ordered: Duty obviously requires that we bless God for our inestimable advantages, and that we reverently and carefully occupy them. It is fit we advert that the present is the only season for this purpose, and that we seriously think how short and uncertain it is. The wastes of death are awful and rapid: that hastening event will soon dismiss us hence, and place us where these things shall be hid for ever from our eyes.

All this is derided as vain and fantastical, by men affecting to be wise beyond others: they would remain without, rather than enter heaven by the gate which admits the crouds coming from the east and west: but their impiety should not lessen religion in our esteem. Their arguments are too subtle to rest our immortal souls upon. To digest their tenets, more credulity and enthusiasm is needed than any they impute to us. Infidelity, as a system, is poorly founded and baseless. What shall be the end of these things? Better suffer their utmost scorn than hazard all through eternity, by copying their rashness.

ness. My soul come not thou into their secret. The foolishness of God is wiser than men.

The means of divine institution are contemned and despised by the profligate. Those men have no reason of their own to render for their impious conduct. They have taken it up from the irreligious, and rested the defence of it upon the principles of unbelief, which they are fond of, though they have never examined them. But this is no disparagement of religion, nor should such example ever seduce us. It were weak and unsafe to follow the implicit followers of others, or to be led by guides which are known to be blind.

The children of levity and dissipation are not quite bold enough to reject or condemn things sacred, but they no less unreasonably slight or neglect them, and that for no other reason but because they are common and familiar. Neither are such patterns for imitation: nothing is matter of more just reproach than that men of thought should surrender themselves to be guided by the inconsiderate and thoughtless. The goodness of God by continuing our privileges is increased and should be endeared. The shameful prevailing ingratitude of multitudes should only teach us to entertain a jealousy over our own minds, lest we too become ungrateful, and lest these sacred things sink also in our esteem,

esteem, and we slide into the fashionable indifference.

After all we are not barely to prize and improve these advantages. The circumstances of the world and of our times, inauspicious and unfriendly to religion, and so to the best interests of mankind, require of us, that we vindicate and assert the excellence of them, and as far as in us lies recommend them to others.

They who are exalted to high stations in life have this much in their power; rank gives them weight and eminence. By an example of piety they have it in their power to spread abroad the principles of undefiled religion among others, and to disseminate happiness which will last beyond the world; they may do much to prevent their brethren from coming to the place of torment; and possessing an influence which goes far beyond their father's house, they can put thousands into the way of life: that enlargement of mind and generosity so becoming them, from which they derive their chief lustre, it is hoped, will incline them to this noble beneficence: by the diffusive exercise of it, they plant gems in the crown laid up for them; faithful over a few things; they shall be rulers over many things; they shall be great in the kingdom of heaven, and shall sit upon thrones.

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They who are put in trust with the gospel as ministers of it, whose sacred province it is to assist mankind in using the means of religion, and to promote the great and final purpose of these, the salvation of souls, may, by fidelity, diligence, and a prudent zeal, become eminently useful. Blessed are the servants whom their Lord when he cometh shall find so doing: glorious shall be their recompence. They that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever.

All of every condition are concerned to prevent the misery of others, and to advance among men the interests of religion and virtue. And, He who with a good and honest heart has done his utmost, though in a narrow sphere of life, shall in no wise lose his reward.

Why should any of whatever name or degree have less compassion for others than is found in Hell? Why should any neglect, while they may, to secure unto their own souls an eternity of bliss? Holiness of heart and life attained through divine grace, and improved by the serious use of the instituted means of religion, is the sum and object of a wise man's endeavour. This is the kingdom of God within, which will terminate in felicity and glory. Happy are all who, disregarding the council of the ungodly, and shunning the way of sinners, submit themselves unto God, and humbly follow that path to happiness

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which he hath marked out. It matters not to what obloquy they are exposed, or through what hard steps of every kind they pass; soon shall they be where there is nothing to hurt, and where sorrow cannot reach. Angels wait for their departure, to convey their souls to heaven. They shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of their father, and enjoy their good things, without intermission, and without end. Amen.

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SERMON VII.

RULES FOR THE PROFITABLE HEARING OF THE WORD.

LUKE VIII. 18.

Take heed therefore how ye hear.

IT cannot fail to be matter of deep concern to the true friends of religion, that it is taught and inculcated with little real effect. This was the case even during our Saviour's personal ministry, with all the singular advantages attending it. In a beautiful parable, beginning at the 4th verse, he sets before those who followed him, how much of the precious seed of the word was lost amongst them. There is reason to apprehend that it fares not better with what is sown now by his ministers: and the caution given to the multitudes who then surrounded our Lord, had a farther view to the hearers of his gospel in succeeding ages. Take heed therefore how ye hear. Since the event of the preaching of the gospel is to be such as has been represented, take heed with what dispositions, and with what effect ye hear, lest with respect unto you it should be in vain.

In discoursing of this weighty admonition, I propose to lay down some plain rules for the profitable

hearing of the word, which may serve to open up the full import of the text, and which may, through the divine blessing, contribute to answer the design of it with regard to you. The rules which I intend to offer may be reduced to three classes: I. Those that respect preparation for hearing. II. Those that serve to direct us to the immediate hearing. III. Such as more peculiarly relate to the proper improvement of what we have heard.

I. Certain rules respect preparation for hearing. Take heed how ye are to hear. Under this class suggest the three following:

1. Labour to divest your mind of prejudice and undue passion.

This is a rule which the teachers of every science begin with, as judging it of the highest importance: and we, with equal or greater reason, may lay it down first, since it is certain that prejudice in matters of religion is both most common, and most fatal. It has been taken up upon various occasions: It has been different at different times, and in different countries. Sometimes it is conceived against the ministers of religion; sometimes against religion itself; most frequently against certain doctrines of it. It has led some to that unhappy pitch of selfishness, that nothing can edify but what pleases them: they receive nothing for truth but what they would have to be so; they reject every thing which does
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not exactly quadrate with their preconceived opinions. But whatever is the kind or foundation of it, there cannot be a more effectual bar in the way of all improvement. Those who are under the influence of it, always think they are in the right: condemn them who will, they applaud themselves; as did the prophet Jonah iv. 9. when he said that he did well to be angry. Thus it blinds the understanding, and locks up the mind, that they are not open to conviction; and preaching can do them no good. The scribes and pharisees were the most expert and knowing of all that attended our Saviour's discourses: but labouring under prejudice, they were rather hardened than bettered by them; and publicans and harlots entered into the kingdom before them. How then can they who are under the like indisposition of mind expect benefit from inferior ministers, who may not once be compared with their great Lord? Would you hear the word of God with advantage, renounce all prejudice of every kind: cultivate an openness and ingenuity of soul: retain no aversion to any thing, except what is false in itself, or evidently wicked in its tendency: be ready to receive whatever is truth, although upon certain accounts it may be unwelcome. Hear this rule inculcated by our Saviour and his apostles, that coming from them it may have the greater weight. Mat. xv. 3. Verily, I say unto you, except

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ye become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. 1 Pet. ii. 2. As new born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.

2. Be careful to abstain from sin.

There have, without all question, been instances of obstinate sinners awakened and convicted by means of the preaching of the word: which shows that it concerned such to attend upon it. But then these are to be esteemed rare, and in some sort miraculous. The influence of it is ordinarily experienced by those who, having given up with vice, sincerely desire to be conducted in the ways of holiness and righteousness. John vii. 17. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God. There is in sin, which is the worst sort of prejudice, an irreconcilable enmity to the truth. The wicked man cannot chuse to look into this mirror, which will not flatter him, but discover his deformities in their just proportion; for as we have it, John iii. 20. Every one that doth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. Accordingly, when Paul reasoned before Felix, of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, the conscious governor quickly waved the subject; go thy way for this time. Or if a wicked man should so far overcome his disaffection to the truths of the gospel, as to
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yield close attention to them, how little benefit does he reap! His mind, darkened with the impure streams of its own corruption, comprehends not the light; like the black cloth which absorbs the brightest sun beams without reflecting any. He may acquire the speculative knowledge of God and divine things, so as to be able to think and reason acutely concerning them; but can receive little of that knowledge which the soul feels and perceives, rather than understands; which impresses the heart, and animates the life. Would you hear so as to profit, struggle against sin: renounce it at least in sincere purpose; and heartily resolve to be what you hear, and in all things to adorn the doctrine of Jesus Christ. This is the best habitual preparation, and is recommended by the apostle James i. 21. Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

3. Study to have your minds possessed with just notions of the dignity of the word of God, when you come up to hear it.

It is not owing to its want of importance, but to our inadvertency in not attending to it, that it generally meets with such coldness and indifference, and yields so little benefit. If we go up to the house of God, regarding our business there as a trivial matter, indulging every vain imagination, it is

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to be thought that the same levity which we carry thither with us, will go along through the whole service, and indispose us for every thing that is weighty or grave. If we attend only for a pastime or amusement, there is no wonder if we find nothing better than we sought for. By way of preparation, let us bethink ourselves, as becomes intelligent and accountable creatures, what we are about; that we are to consult in the holy temple to know what the Lord will say to our soul; that we are to hear the word, not of man, but of God; the word preached in his name by his prophets and ministers; the word once published by a greater ambassador, Christ Jesus, his well beloved Son; the word attested by the Holy Ghost, in which as the advocate of God, he pleads the cause of truth; the word of reconciliation and of eternal life; the word which issues from heaven, and is the ordinary mean of leading souls to heaven, and to the God of life and truth. Such reflections as these, liberally indulged, would compose, nay consecrate, the mind; they would whet our appetite for spiritual truth, and promote that hungry and thirsting after righteousness which will give an unwonted relish to all we hear, and which God himself will satisfy. The wise man meant to recommend such reverend thoughts as these we have mentioned in his precept.

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Ecc. v. 1, Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God.

II. A second class of rules may serve to direct as to the immediate hearing of the word: and of these also we shall offer three.

I. Attend with care and diligence unto the whole of what is said.

Our thoughts are never more prone to wander, than where steadiness is most requisite. Inattention in the time of sermon, like other bad habits, is insensibly contracted, though hard to be remedied. It grows up during the levity of youth, is encouraged by indulgence, and at length riveted by the weakness of age. So common and prevalent it is, that we may say concerning numbers who frequent our public assemblies, they have not ears to hear. That inattention prevents all the benefit of preaching, needs scarce to be observed. If our mind is absent, our bodies might be so too, and nothing can be gained by what we give not heed to. The profligate, who are never to be seen at church, are the more culpable, it must be allowed, as their example is cruelty to numbers. But in the case of the inattentive, there appears to be much guilt. Incompliance with custom, or to gratify others, they give their bodily presence; but in obedience to the divine law, they will not bring up their mind: their complaisance is stronger than their piety: and

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who sees not that the compliment which they pay to the world reflects dishonour upon God? The sermon, it may be alledged, is not such as to merit strict regard. But do they who object in this manner, employ the short space they are in church better, than if they followed their spiritual guide? or have they projected any scheme of great importance, while others listened to the sermon? and if they have gained nothing, none can tell how much they may have forfeited, as the blessing of God sometimes goes along with the most unlikely and unpromising mean. Summon in, therefore, your thoughts, and bend them to close attention to the word of God: watch over them with jealousy, that they wander not: imitate the convert Lydia, of whom we read, Acts xvi. 14. whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. Isa. lv. 3. Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live.

2. Receive the word with faith.

The preachers of the gospel arrogate not to themselves infallibility, nor desire to exact any implicit belief of their own dictates; but willingly acknowledge they are bound to support what they offer with solid reason, or show that it is contained in the sacred oracles. What we plead for is only this, that it is incumbent on the hearers carefully to weigh the argument of the discourse, and when by
searching

searching the scriptures, after the example of the noble Beræans, whether these things are so, they find what is said suitably confirmed, to regard it as the word of God, not of man, and to yield it an hearty assent. Numbers seem to be too easily satisfied in this matter, judging it enough if they are not troubled with scruples or doubts concerning the truths of religion; but this negative sort of faith is not sufficient. A firm and well grounded persuasion of what we hear is absolutely necessary, in order to its producing any solid or lasting effect. Principles which we take up, we know not well for what, without examination or reason, we will part with, and renounce without much struggle: unless we are firmly rooted and grounded in the faith of them, they may yield us a short lived pleasure, and operate for a little; but they will never withstand temptation or persecution, these great trials of sincerity. The word preached to such as receive it not in faith, is like the seed scattered on the rock, where there is not soil to nourish it. Of such our Saviour says, ver. 13. when they hear, they receive the word with joy; but having no root, for a while believe, and in the time of temptation fall away. And we find that, in the case of the Hebrews, the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.

3. Receive the word with love and the exercise of good affections.

It is not enough that it is credited; it must likewise be loved. It is addressed to the affections, as well as the understanding; it is intended to improve both, and therefore it must be received by both. While it rests in the brain, it may serve to amuse and adorn, but at the best is useless furniture; and only when it descends into the heart, out of which are the issues of life, becomes an operative principle. The mind during the sermon should, in its frame and temper, resemble a well tuned instrument of music, under the hand of a skilful player. Each string and affection should be ready at the slightest touch to strike the proper note. When the divine goodness is handled, love to him who is love, should stir in the breast: the terrors of the Lord should awaken fear: the precious promises should animate hope: the beauties of holiness should command veneration; and the sacred passions should rise in succession, as the thoughts suggested call them up. The two disciples acknowledged to each other the emotions which they felt during our Lord's conversation with them, as they journeyed to Emmaus, Luke xxiv, 32. Did not our heart burn within us while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures; and while he talks with us by his ministers

ministers our hearts should, in like manner, feel a perpetual glow. The word of God may properly be considered as a seal upon which his own likeness is engraven. When the soul is melted down in its affections, it yields like wax while it is hot, and easily receives the divine image: whereas when it is cold and unaffected, it is hard and unpliant, and resists the impression. We may hear a great deal, but if we receive the truths of religion with indifference, and without a suitable relish for them, our improvement will be small: Nay we read of many, 2 Thess. ii. 10. That perished, because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

III. The rules reserved to the last class relate more properly to the due improvement of what we have heard: and that these are also intended in our Saviour's admonition, appears from the discourse upon which it is grafted, where we may observe that the unfruitfulness of the word is ascribed especially to negligence after hearing.

1. Let the mind in your retirement carefully recall, and dwell upon the truths which you have heard.

Religious truths, like all others, must by composed thought and recollection be lodged with the memory, and made our own; and the sooner this follow upon the back of hearing, it is both the more easy, and the more useful. In the case of any thing
injurious

injurious to us, the memory is retentive even to a fault; which seems to be owing wholly to this, that we are altogether engaged, and brood much upon it. If we were equally concerned about the doctrines of religion, this faculty would be found a more faithful repository than is generally thought; and though the whole sermons cannot be remembered, yet by the seasonable exercise of meditation, the soul would experience a gradual improvement, and come, without our perceiving it, to be thoroughly replenished, so as to answer all the exigencies of life. Out of a mind thus stored and instructed, we might bring forth, as occasion required, like the good householder out of his treasure, things new and old. This bread of life digested by meditation, would feed and nourish the soul. Whereas without this, your attention to the word goes for nought: and we are become unto you but as a sounding brass or tinkling cymbal. When the word is preached; the seed indeed is sown: but to secure it from accidents, it is necessary that it be immediately harrowed and covered over, which must be done by careful meditation; otherwise, as it is beautifully figured, ver. 5. like the seed which fell by the way side, it will be trodden down, and the fowls of the air will devour it: Satan, by means of light and vain thoughts, will utterly efface any slight impression that had been made.

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By the same exercise of serious reflection, what we have once deposited in the memory, must frequently be reviewed, that it may dwell in us richly. As nothing can operate where it is not, so if the word is not present in the hour of difficulty or trial, it is of no avail; and therefore, as we are to believe and love the truths of God, so we must study to have them much with us, like the friends we love and trust, that we may be benefited by them. This exhortation may be well enforced in the beautiful words of the wise man. Prov. vi. 21, 22, 23. Bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck. When thou goest it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest it shall keep thee; and when thou walkest it shall talk with thee. For the commandment is a lamp, and the law is a light, and reproofs of instruction are the way of life.

2. Study to preserve yourselves, as much as may be, disengaged from the world.

While we are in the world, we must act a part, and take our share in its concerns, either public or private, that we may be useful in the station wherein Providence has placed us: but to incumber ourselves with more than is necessary, is dangerous, and oftentimes proves fatal. If we involve ourselves in cares that are either unlawful in kind, or immoderate in degree, these will altogether occupy our mind, and dislodge the most pleasing impressions which

which religious subjects may have left within us. Know ye not, saith the Apostle James iv. 4. that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be the friend of the world, is the enemy of God. Lectures of justice and honesty are little regarded, or soon forgotten, by those who are given up to covetousness. The most pathetic sermons upon charity will rarely open the heart which is bound up in the world: and piety is recommended in vain to these whose God is their belly, and who mind earthly things. It is told of one of the fathers of the church, that the worldly felicity which he most esteemed and envied, was to have heard St Paul in the pulpit, and to have conversed with our Saviour in person: but there is great reason to doubt whether a man immersed in the world could profit even by such advantages. Demas was long the companion and attendant of Paul, and yet the Apostle says of him, 2 Tim. iv. 10. For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world. Many of those who followed Christ, and heard his divine discourses, forsook the principles of their great master for the sake of their farms, and their merchandise: and one of his Apostles, who shared with a few, the inestimable privilege of his secret conversation and private friendship, betrayed him for thirty pieces of silver. Or if our excessive regards to the world and the things of it, do not lead

us to these heights of wickedness, yet it woefully entangles us: like the rank weeds which waste and impoverish the soil,—it exhausts the spirit, so that the word, however received and entertained for a little, proves at length unfruitful. This is well described in the parable, by the seed which fell among thorns; which our Saviour thus interprets, ver. 14. And that which fell among thorns, are they which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choaked with cares and riches, and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection. Would you, then, profit by the word, let a just concern for your soul take place of every thing in your breast; and let all be subordinate to this: Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Undertake no more business of a temporal nature, than it is possible to accomplish without any hazard of shutting out, or neglecting the work of eternity. Mind, amidst the variety of cares which are ready to distract your soul, that One thing is needful. Remember the instructive history of Mary, that profitable hearer of the word, who, while her sister was cumbered about much serving, and troubled about many things, sat at Jesus feet, and is thus applauded by him, Luke x. 42. And Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her.

3. Apply what you have heard to the direction of your life and conduct.

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This is the great precept into which all must be resolved and summed up. Though you have stored your mind with the finest speculations, and learnt to distinguish and argue with precision on the most intricate subjects of divinity, yet if it rest in theory and system, and is not brought down to practice, the end of hearing is by no means attained. A person may have the knowledge of an angel, and yet be a devil. He that committeth sin is of the devil. Such knowledge as this indeed deserves not the name; for, says the Apostle, 1 John ii. 4. He that saith I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. Such knowledge, if we call it so, will be so far from being any furtherance to our happiness, that it will be one of the heaviest aggravations of our misery. Practice is all in all. John xiii. 17. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them. Preaching, like scripture, is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; and the same is the end of both, 2 Tim. iii. 17. That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. The seed is sown that it may produce fruit; and we are then only profitable hearers, when, as it is expressed, ver. 15. Having heard the word, we keep it in a good and honest heart, and bring forth fruit with patience. Our Saviour shows how vain it is to attend unto his doctrine, unless it descend into our life,

life, and regulate our conduct, Matt. vii. 24. Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the wind blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell not; for it was founded upon a rock. 26. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house; and it fell, and great was the fall of it. The necessity of practice is beautifully represented and strongly enforced upon the hearers of the gospel, by the Apostle James i. 22. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But who so looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he, being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

To the rules already laid down, we shall add another, which does not properly belong to any one class, but is rather common to all.

Depend upon God; and by prayer implore his help and assistance in the whole of this work.

This is absolutely necessary to preparation, and to suitable improvement. Paul may plant, and Apollos water; yet as we are instructed, 1 Cor. iii. 7. Neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth: but God that giveth the increase. By the morning prayer the heart should be consecrated, and opened to receive the word: By the evening prayer, instruction should be shut up and sealed: Prayer should intermingle with it, and in ejaculatory requests or wishes, be put up at proper periods. In this way might hearing be converted into the nature of devotion, and become acceptable to God, as well as profitable to ourselves. In this way might the spirit be drawn down into our hearts, to accompany the outward mean, even the spirit of wisdom, and revelation in the knowledge of Christ. The Psalmist David was no ordinary proficient in the knowledge of the divine law: He was become by it wiser than his enemies, and had acquired more understanding than all his teachers. Yet we often find him putting up petitions for further light and instruction, in which we may fitly join. Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes, and I shall keep it to the end. Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law, yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart. Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness. Turn thou away mine eyes from beholding vanity, and quicken me in thy way. Stablish thy word unto thy servant who is devoted to thy fear.

S E R M O N V I I I .
O N I N C O N S I D E R A T I O N .

ISAIAH I. 3.

— *My people doth not consider.*

ISAIAH the son of Amos prophesied for the space of sixty years, from the last year of the reign of Uzziah to the death of king Hezekiah, when, according to the account received in the church by tradition, and supposed to be alluded to in the New Testament, Heb. xi. 37. he was sawn asunder — His book may be considered as divided into different parts. The first of these we have in this and the four following chapters. It treats of the state of the Jewish nation in his times, at once a wicked and a wretched people. Their character and manners here delineated, and set before their own eyes, cannot fail to strike us — and their circumstances, as an exiled captive people, are fit to move commiseration. Now the text lays open the cause of all, the source of their corruption, and consequent misery, viz. a fatal inconsideration. This rendered them insensible of the mercies of God to the most astonishing degree. Ver. ii. 3. Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth,

O earth, for the Lord hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib, but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.—This rendered his fatherly corrections also ineffectual to reclaim them, and shut their ears against his calls. Ver. 5. Why should ye be stricken any more, ye will revolt more and more.—Here is a fore evil which produced the wickedness of this people, and at the same time by frustrating every mean of providence and grace, prevented their recovery. It is to be lamented that the evil is not more grievous than common. The account given of the state of the Jews will apply to many other nations, and is in some respects, the most apt description of our own. God who nourished them as children and chastened them for their profit, has, in the same manner, tutored and chastened us in vain. That which was their characteristic is also our's. The spring of their misery is like to be the source of misery to us.

That God may awaken you to serious and sober thought, is my most earnest desire and prayer for you: and that endeavours for this purpose may be joined with wishes, I have taken up this subject of discourse; and in treating it, I propose,

I. To explain the prophet's complaint, or to show what is meant by inconsideration.

II. To

II. To expose the evil of inconsideration, by enumerating its bad effects.

III. To trace it back to its ordinary causes, that these being discovered, we may know what is fit to be done or avoided, in order that, through the blessing of God, it may be remedied.

I. It is proposed to explain the complaint, or to show what is meant by inconsideration.

This is not to be taken in the strictest sense, as if men could be charged with a total inconsideration, and want of thought. The soul is by its nature active, and will be employed. If we direct it not to matters of importance, it will go out after vanity, and how soon, through our neglect, good is absent, evil is present with us. When we wake, and often when we sleep, it is busy: perhaps the human mind always thinks.

The Jews are not here accused, as if they never thought at all of the subjects of religion; and indeed there are none upon whom a charge of this kind can be fixed. The atheist turns it over, that, if possible, he might catch it by some wrong handle: he sifts it as wheat, that he may find fault with it.

Neither do the words imply that they had not their seasons of seriousness and sober thought. We read, Ps. lxxviii. 34. When he slew them, then they sought him: and they returned, and enquired early after God; and they remembered that God was
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their Rock, and the high God their Redeemer. Adversity is wont to force every man to consider; and, if the unbelieving and abominable are excepted, who escape not without their qualms of melancholy reflection, there are none who have not their occasional good moods and serious thoughts.

But that which is here complained of, is, that they did not duly and properly consider. The Being and all-ruling providence of God, their obligations to serve him, the danger of offending him, the certainty of death and judgment, and the awfulness of eternity,—these they did not ordinarily and habitually attend to. They brought them not up close to the mind, so as thoroughly to know and discern them in their truth and importance; and they were not careful to detain and dwell upon them, till abiding and practical impressions were made.

This is a case, alas! not uncommon. Some are more, and others less culpable; but the fault is in some degree universal.

Good men I would unwillingly accuse or upbraid: they judge and condemn themselves: many of those failings and miscarriages which have sullied their life, and interrupted their comfort, have taken their rise from this. That they have not served God with greater or more unremitting ardour, and made much greater progress in religion, is owing to a deficiency

fiency here; for this their repentings have often been kindled within them.

The wicked stand convicted by their practice. The whole of it discovers a strange incogitancy and thoughtlessness. To what else can we attribute not only the madness and follies of their giddy youth, but the extravagancies of maturer years, and the cooler impieties of a reproachful hardened old age? Psalm xxxvi. 1. The transgression of the wicked, faith within my heart, that there is no fear of God before his eyes. x. 4. God is not in all his thoughts. His ways are always grievous. The prophet's complaint may be made of us; of this people, and of every individual; nay, of all characters, good and bad, My people doth not consider.

II. I now proceed to expose the evil of inconsideration, by pointing out its bad effects. Amongst these, the five following are remarkable.

1. Ignorance, or the want of a just apprehension of things, is the fruit of inconsideration.

This is suggested by the connexion of our text with the words preceding: Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. There are some of astonishing stupidity, that have not attended so far to the matters of religion, and the concerns of their souls, as to discern the importance of knowing them. They seem altogether indifferent; they care for none of these things. Such are commonly as ignorant as

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they are listless. They who are led by example to use all other means of acquiring knowledge, and yet do not by themselves seriously and duly consider, are generally little benefited by their labour, and spend their money for that which is not bread. Slight consideration is wont to produce superficial knowledge; and a total inconsideration occasions total ignorance. A well grounded and distinct knowledge of spiritual things, can only be attained by considering them maturely. Deep impressions of them are only to be made by detaining them long, and having them often before the mind. By recollection they are digested, so as to nourish and cheer the soul; to strengthen and exhilarate. Happy are they who by this exercise bind the truths of religion upon their heart, and tie them as ornaments about their neck. Happy are we, if we meditate in his law day and night. Then, when we go forth, it shall lead us; when we sleep, it shall keep us; and when we awake, it shall talk with us: for the commandment is a lamp, and the law is light, and reproofs of instruction are the way of life.

The knowledge which some have acquired by a natural penetration and acuteness of mind, without considering things, is but flight, and sits loose; easily come by, and easily lost, it imparts no strength and little joy. This is the useless furniture of the head. It is like the top of Pisga, which may serve

to show us the land of Canaan, but cannot put us in possession of it: or, like the talent of the unprofitable servant, which procured punishment, but no reward. Of those who are best accomplished in this way, if after all they digest not by meditation the truths which they so readily and easily conceive, it may be said that their light is, to any valuable purpose, but darkness. Though they are able to speak with tongues, and understand all mysteries, if this is wanting they are nothing. The simple and unlearned man who has less sagacity, but more sincerity, who comprehends fewer objects, but thinks more, is wiser than them all. They are reputed wise in their generation: He is really so, and will be wise in his latter end.

2. Inconsideration not only prevents our progress in knowledge, but also derogates from our goodness, or entirely destroys it.

The inward principle or intention is that which determines the nature of our actions; and makes them either good or evil. If there is in the mind a prevailing regard to God, a dutiful sense of our obligations, and a desire to please him, this spirit of piety consecrates every thing we do. Whether we eat or drink, all is accepted as done to the glory of God. The widow's mite is received, or the cup of cold water: and a person is accepted according to that he hath, and not according to that he hath not.

But the mind can only be fixed, and this pious disposition maintained, by frequent recollection. Without this, love will quickly wax cold; false and selfish principles will mix with our regard to God, which, like the vile alloy, spoils and debases the precious metal. The heart, not kept with diligence, will start aside, like the deceitful bow. This religion in the inner man, the soul and spirit of all, is not the attainment of those who ramble through life, who are strangers to retirement, and converse little with their own heart. Such persons may, from natural benevolence, and the first happy bias of education, prove the authors of much good to themselves and others. The world will applaud, and posterity will praise them; but how stand their best actions in the account of God? Of these he may say, as he did of the Jewish fasts, Have ye done them at all unto me, even unto me? There is no religion in them. What kind offices they have done, will yield returns of satisfaction upon every review, the certain fruit and special encouragement of beneficence. But, after all, they will want half the comfort which others enjoy, who have done the same things not only to men, but heartily as unto the Lord: and they cannot look for any after recompence. They have gratified a tender compassion, and perhaps received honour of men. Verily, verily, I say unto you, they have their reward.

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What pity is it, that they who, from an amiable temper and generous warmth of soul, do much good in their generation, should yet forfeit so much for the want of serious thought. Like the young man in the parable who had kept the commandments from his youth up, they lack one thing, and shall never enter into the kingdom of heaven, though they appear to be not far from it.

3. Inconsideration lays us open to temptation.

There are in the world circumstances remarkably favourable to virtue, by which some are protected from grosser vices, in a manner without taking thought for themselves or their own safety. Such are they who grow up under the eye of pious and vigilant parents; or whose lot it is to be closely connected with them that fear God; and they also whose situation in life affords fewer and more rare occasions for wickedness. Except from corruption, which is bred and nourished within, they are in no great hazard. But every one enjoys not these advantages. There are few who can boast that this hedge of the Lord is around them on every side. The generality are much more exposed; and where a constant attention to the concerns of their souls, and their better interests, is not maintained, they are every moment in danger at once from within and from without. Where the mind is vacant and unemployed, evil thoughts will insinuate themselves,

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as naturally as air presses into the empty space. When the understanding is not exercised to discern good and evil, we will proceed at random, and follow the bias of corruption. It is easy to foresee that one who has shut his eyes will soon go astray, and fall into the ditch. Most vices are in themselves shocking, and the end of these things is death. While men are attentive, they tremble to think of committing them. But when the mind is absent, every one rushes into his evil courses, as the horse rusheth into the battle.—When the prophet of the Lord laid out before Hazael the cruel part he was to act, how was his abhorrence roused! and yet this part he did not hesitate to act; without thought he did the things which he could not and durst not think of. Thoughtlessness prepares us for the purposes of every seducer. It exposes us to the temptations of Satan, our worst enemy, who goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. In this situation he finds us neither ready to fly, nor to resist. This is his hour, and the power of darkness. The mind vacant and unfurnished is like his own house, as it is called in the parable, empty, swept, and garnished: he will enter in, and fill all its chambers. When Job's children met, and feasted together, their social happiness and concord was the joy of his heart. But at these seasons of innocent indulgence, their minds were dissipated, and he was
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not without uneasy apprehension upon their account. Hence, while they were feasting, he was sacrificing; while they were off their guard, he was piously commending them to the divine protection. Experience must surely by this time have taught us all, that, when we are least apprehensive, we are most in danger; that thoughtlessness and security, like pride, go before a fall, and that the first wanderings from God proceed from inattention.

4. Inconsideration not only exposes to temptation, but also gives it an advantage against us which is likely to prevail.

It will be found that riches, honour, and pleasure, these idols which have divided and enslaved mankind, derive their influence from hence. What are riches, if matters are thoroughly examined? To the possessor they are cumbersome, and to his posterity ensnaring, and often ruinous. At any rate they profit not in the hour of death; as they come, so shall they go. With regard to honour, fame, and preferment, the pride of life, how few are successful in the pursuit of them! How precarious is the possession! How empty and unsatisfying, even when kept! And as for pleasure, the world is gone after her; but what is she? A phantom of happiness, a gleam of joy, yielding a delight, which is momentary, and followed often by pain, which is real and lasting. These cannot stand the test of reason, and
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examination, and have from the beginning succeeded by imposing upon the thoughtless and inadvertent. No man ever yet sat down, and in a cool mood satisfied himself that it was fit to hazard his soul, and an immortality of bliss, for such things as these. Inattention spreads a mist before the eyes, which magnifies the objects of sense. Thousands engage rashly in the pursuit. The difficulties and obstructions in the way, whet their impatience. Imagination gives things the heightening. Under the power of strong delusion they believe lies, and are undeceived too late. Our obligations to God who hath loaded us with benefits, and bought us with a price. Our solemn vows and sacramental engagements,—the temporal blessings and the curfings of God's law,—and the consequences of a present life, through all the ages of eternity;—these are weighty matters. But the same inconsideration which magnifies the former objects, and keeps them constantly before us, lessens these, and keeps them out of sight. The temptations have by this means leave to work upon us without any thing to impede their influence. We look at the things which are seen and temporal, not at the things which are unseen and eternal. In these circumstances, sense must prevail; we shall be overcome of evil; the soul is in danger of hell-fire.

5. In the last place, inconsideration hardens the heart, and often prevents the sinner's recovery.

Where there is not a serious consideration, there can be no conviction; and this we know is antecedent to real conversion. What hope is there, then, of the sinner, whom thoughtlessness has betrayed into the snares of vice? Will not the same inconsideration render him secure? Is there not danger left his soul be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin? Many and apposite are the means which God in mercy uses for the sinner's recovery; but this habit of absence and dissipation eludes, and disappoints them all. The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than the two-edged sword. This, however, is as much lost where the mind is inattentive, as where the ears are shut. Hence our Lord so often introduced his discourses with this preface; He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.—The mercy of God in Christ Jesus is a most powerful attractive: The most amiable display of it, however, will be found no effectual allurement, where men are strangers to their real condition, or blind to their danger. They that are whole seek not the physician, but they that are sick.

The terrors of the Lord which thunder with a louder voice, upon a thoughtless mind leave only a faint impression. They who now quake and tremble, as the Israelites did at Mount Sinai, in a little

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have no fear of God; and like persons disturbed, more properly than awakened, return to their quiet rest, and sleep on the more secure. The ministers of God, in all their endeavours to save or benefit the inattentive, have reason to lament that they have run in vain, and laboured in vain. By such their loud and serious warnings are disregarded as ridiculous outcry; and sober counsel is set at nought. Psalm lviii. 4. Their poison is like the poison of a serpent; they are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear, which will not hearken to the voice of the charmers, charming never so wisely. Distress, the rod of God's power, as well as of his anger, by which he is wont to subdue the people under him, and bring sinners to themselves, often fails of producing any effect, through the security and inattention of men. They remember it no longer than they are under it, and forget the vows it has extorted, how soon they are able to break them. This hammer of affliction, instead of breaking, hardens the heart by its repeated strokes. Hence said God to this people who did not consider, ver. 5. Why should ye be stricken any more; ye will revolt more and more. In this case, where external means have been slighted and despised, or proved abortive, the sinner can only be roused by the immediate and mighty power of grace. But will God send forth his spirit, where the ordinary efforts of his hand have

have been contracted? Prov. i. 28. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer, they shall seek me early but they shall not find me: For that they hated knowledge; and did not choose the fear of the Lord. They would none of my counsel, and they despised all my reproof. Or, if God who deals not with us according to our sins, and has mercy upon whom he will have mercy, vouchsafe to pour out his spirit, may not his ordinary operations be resisted, and his suggestions disregarded? Then the spirit will return unto God who gave it; and wo to that man from whom he finally departs: that day, with reference to the divine life, it may be said his thoughts perish. Then indeed a deep sleep shall fall upon him: He shall sleep his sleep outright, while his judgment lingereth not, and his damnation slumbereth not.

Thus have we seen the evil of inconsideration in its ordinary effects. It obstructs our proficiency in knowledge, derogates from our goodness, exposes us to temptation, gives it a prevailing advantage, and by defeating the means and purposes of divine grace, prevents our recovery. Let not its harmless appearance impose upon us; these are its fruits; and by these it has ruined more than half the world. The prudent man foreseeth the evil and hideth himself.

III. I proceed, as was proposed, to trace inconsideration back to its ordinary causes, that, these being discovered, we may know what is fit to be done, or avoided, in order that, by the blessing of God, it may be remedied. The following appear to be the principal sources from whence it proceeds.

1. Error or mistake in regard to the nature of consideration.

Of the many that pass through this world without attending soberly to the things of religion, there are not a few who do so, not knowing their error; which we are not bound to believe, seeing in other matters they do not allow themselves in the things which they condemn. They have their times of composure, when they are sedate and thoughtful. When any thing alarming occurs in the course of providence, you may find them pensive; in the day of adversity they consider. The Sabbaths of the Lord are for the greater part sacred to divine worship and meditation; and the sacrament is preceded and followed by days of recollection. They have not thought that the objects of religion deserve much more than these portions or reverſions of time; that the safety of the soul, which is exposed defenceless during the intervals of reflection, demands much more; and that more is in duty required of every christian, when he is called to set the Lord ever before him, to meditate in the law of God day and night,

night, to look at the things which are not seen, and to have his conversation in heaven. A partial consideration is taken for the whole of duty. Others about them of a fair name for religion have done no more. Judging themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, they are deceived and deciderate not that habitual attention and recollected state of soul, which, like presence of mind to the soldier, is our safety in the warfare of life. They are conscious of no error in their conduct, and therefore think of no remedy; They spy no deficiency, and therefore look for no supply. The words of the spirit unto the church of the Laodiceans describe their delusion, and mark out their duty. Rev. iii. 17, 18. Because thou sayst, I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked, I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed; and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve that thou mayest see.

2. Another ordinary cause of inconsideration is an habit of levity and fickleness of mind contracted in our early years.

There is something of this kind natural to man, which is one of the most conspicuous marks of a degenerate

degenerate state. This by the negligence or fond indulgence of parents is encouraged rather than checked, and grows up in time to a confirmed habit. In the lower classes of life, where the worldly occasions exact a close attention to some lawful employment, you find men in their secular affairs wise and sedate; yet in what respects religion, which is a matter of free choice, the mind is left to wander; and here they are unfixed and unstable. In the higher stations, the same fickleness is found more universal. By their easy circumstances; they are liberated from earning their bread with application, and the sweat of their brows; and by a misjudged education, seem to be set free from every other useful and important study. Here little time or thought is needed for this world, and little is bestowed upon the next. Our youth are soon introduced into company, relaxed from all discipline, and without any useful task to occupy their time, or exercise their genius. With the thirst of mirth and pleasure they set out to prove whatever is good under the sun. Amusements await them, suiting their taste rather than adapted to improvement; and so crowded in close succession as to find employment for the day, and thought for the night. The mind tutored in this manner, more and more disrelishes whatever is sober and grave. Except in a tender season meeting with a tender mood, circumstances which con-

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cur not every day, religion cannot please. In regard to it, a desultory and unsettled habit is contracted worse to be remedied perhaps than any other, as it stands upon its own innocence, and has nothing in it shocking. That vanity which was wont to be thought peculiar to childhood and youth, is now seen to encroach upon maturer years. Life, which has been figured as a dream, seems by the way in which it is spent, to be really so. A levity of mind, in great measure the fruit of bad education, prevails in all stations to the shameful neglect of religion. Surely mean men are vanity and men of high degree are a lie. Am I awake, or am I not rather asleep? Is all I see only a vision of the night? Are these about me who ramble away so merrily without thought or care, are they indeed acting a part for eternity? Or are they not rather personating characters for the trifling purposes of entertainment? Atheism under the notion of a refined and free way of thinking, and levity of manners wearing the name of polite conversation, are the characteristics of the present age; and betwixt the two, threaten the extinction of seriousness and sound wisdom. Will it be thought we speak the words of soberness, when we adventure to admonish you, Ps. ii. 10, 12. Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed ye judges of the earth, serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling.

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Ec. xi. 9. Rejoice, O young man in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment. Prov. xx. 6. Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

3. Another cause of inconsideration is that men's thoughts are altogether turned another way.

The busy part of the world are so much taken up about bucks or honours, or pleasures, according to their different turn, that they have no spirit left to look after any thing else. Of all the other objects about us, pleasure is that which does most readily entice us in our younger years, and at the same time does most entirely engross and intoxicate the mind. Whoredom and wine take away the heart. But an undue attachment to interest or honour, or an immoderate care for the concerns of this life, will engage the attention so much as to leave almost no place for religion. No man can serve two masters. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. The things of this world, and the things of the other, are placed opposite to each other. When we look to the one we turn away from the other; and the soul cannot move at the same time toward both. How should the sensual and worldling be persuaded

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to mind the concerns of eternity. They are already pre-engaged, and have got enough to mind. Other subjects are familiar and agreeable; they care for none of these things. He that would divert them into any other track, is like one who labours to force a river out of its old channel. This is the source of that inconsideration which abounds among the industrious and active, who pass for wise in their generation. But is there any real wisdom in postponing the kingdom of God and his righteousness to the toys of children, the vanities of the world; in putting that first which should be last, and the last first. In a little this mad bustle shall be over; and what shall be the end of these things? The soul shall survive, and live for ever: the things without shall be sought for, but they shall not be found. What is a man profited, then, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul, or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? Deut. xxxii. 28, 29. They are a nation void of counsel, neither is there any understanding in them. O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!

4. Sloth is another and common cause of inconsideration.

This is a disposition, or rather an indisposition, of mind more frequent than is generally believed. Were it the mean only of keeping men disengaged

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from the fatiguing gaieties of the fashionable world; or from the incessant wearisome toils of them that hasten to be rich and great, I might leave it to the censure of others. But since it is productive likewise of much languor and torpitude in spiritual business; and is one of the principal sources of that reproachful inattention to religion of which there is so much reason to complain, it cannot be omitted here. To extricate things and set the house in order after long inadvertence, is a matter of no small application. To take the first steps in repentance, after it has been long neglected, requires no small labour and travail of soul. These difficulties the slothful man foresees and magnifies. There is a lion, he says, in the path; and he will be excused. Yet a little slumber, yet a little sleep, yet a little folding of the hands to sleep. He is impatient of counsel, and likes not to be urged on to what is disagreeable. What is alarming produces a transient horror, or a fit of remorse, but seldom awakens lasting compunction. When any thing occurs to disturb his mind, he consults only how to recover his ease and quiet for the present, not taking thought for the future. He would shift the uneasiness by turning to the other side, and he is like the door on his hinges, moving without making progress. He is irritated and provoked by that which should awaken him, and seems as much afraid of what should rouse him, as the unhappy demoniacs

demoniacs were of that power which alone could cure them, when they cried out, saying, Matt. xviii. 29. Jesus, thou Son of God, art thou come hither to torment us before the time? Is not this a gross infatuation, nay, a possession of the devil? Why such aversion to trouble, which would procure rest; to momentary pain, which would issue in everlasting pleasure? Must you not some time or other know the worst of repentance, or incur what is infinitely worse? Distress and anguish await you. As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between thee and death. What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, escape for thy life.

5. Another cause, the most frequent of all, and in its effects the most fatal, is presumption, or an ill-grounded conceit that there will be time enough afterwards for becoming serious.

Such events will sometimes occur in the lot of every one, even the most prosperous, as cannot fail to rouse men from security. The mind, however disused and disinclined to reflection, will upon occasions exert itself. Unwelcome thoughts of God and neglected duty, of our sin and our danger, will sometimes break in, notwithstanding our utmost aversion; but through insincere and affected delays; these favourable seasons pass without improvement, and our promising good moods are diverted. We read, Acts xxiv. 24, 25. That Felix, with his wife

Drusilla, sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled. Here were good and hopeful beginnings: from such convictions, some fruits might have reasonably been expected: but a fallacious delay suffered to intervene, rendered all abortive. Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time, when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee. In this path many have gone before and many have followed the Roman governour: and the same art of self-deceit, exploded and condemned in others, we continue to practise upon ourselves with woeful success. They who cannot think of dying in their sins and going down into the pit, yet can cheerfully hazard all this, by adjourning repentance unto a term which they may never see. A resolution of becoming serious some time or other, What is this when examined? It is in truth a resolution to be wicked for a season. And yet with this, such as it is, many are satisfied; and resting on this they take their swing, their fill of pleasure. This delusion is certainly of the devil; by this he has slain his ten thousands. I may say to every simple one who has suffered himself to be imposed upon, as the Apostle Peter said to Ananias, Acts v. 3. Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie unto the Holy Ghost? Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men but unto God. Or if there

was any sincerity in these fallacious purposes, supposing that something more was intended than merely the procuring a delay, yet who can tell if ever they will, or can be executed? Do ye who are so easy now in the view of what is to be done some time hence, do ye know what a day shall bring forth? If you see to-morrow, will it not be as this day, and perhaps bring with it more and greater temptations? Will you not every day have a heavier task and more time to redeem, while both your inclination and your strength are becoming less? May not the conscience be seared, and the spirit of God withdrawn? for his spirit will not always strive with men. What then shall become of your purposes, on which so much stress has been laid? What shall become of your soul irrecoverably and foolishly lost? Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge? 2 Cor. vi. 2. Behold, now is the accepted time: behold, now is the day of salvation. Heb. iii. 7, 8. To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

6. In fine, the last source of inconsideration which I shall mention, is impiety. A neglect of the worship of God, and particularly of prayer.

It may be thought that what we state as the cause, is more strictly speaking rather the effect. But it is evident that the two have mutually an influence upon each other; and the neglect of devotion produces much of that carelessness about religion, which
every

every good man must lament. By the habitual stated acts of worship, an holy familiarity and acquaintance with God and divine things is maintained.— In these we have the most solemn and affecting views of our spiritual state. By these devout exercises, in the presence of him who searches the heart, the mind learns to be attentive, and acquires an habit of recollection. The thoughts that pass within, morning and evening while we are before him, will more easily and readily recur through the day, and possess our reins in the watches of the night. When these devout exercises are forgotten and disused, the most rational mean of fixing the soul is slighted, and as might be expected, insensibility, dissipation of thought, and a dissolute state of mind are found to ensue. But this matter is to be taken in a higher view. The acts of worship are not to be considered merely as the most useful exercises of meditation. They are the appointments of God, and have an eminent virtue from the divine institution. It is the special office of the ever-blessed Spirit to illuminate the soul, to warm the heart, and command the attention. We read concerning Lydia, Acts xvi. 14. That the Lord opened her heart, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul, i. e. to the evidences and truths of the gospel. Now prayer is the appointed mean of drawing down the Spirit of grace. The happy convert mentioned, was, as the text declares, a worshipper of God.—

Said

Said our Saviour, Luke xi. 9, 13. I say unto you, ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and ye shall find: knock, and it shall be opened unto you. Your heavenly Father will give the holy Spirit to them that ask him. But men ask not, and therefore they receive not; failing in the easy condition, they forfeit the blessing; and as they set at nought his counsel in the provision made for their weakness, He hides his face, and takes his holy Spirit away. Nay I doubt not that their impiety is punished with judicial insensibility. So that of many it may be said, as it was of the rejected of Israel, Acts xi. 8. God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear. How unaccountable is the folly of those who neglect the worship of God, and condemn his ordinances! And why are they to be found in such numbers? The profane withhold nothing from God that can profit him; but their own souls are injured. They are sufferers in their most important interests. Job describes them justly, Job xxi. 14, 15. They say unto God, depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have if we pray unto him. And then he says well concerning them, ver. 16. Lo, their good is not in their hand: the counsel of the wicked is far from me.

Thus,

Thus, my friends, have I warned you against a prevailing and fatal evil; an evil which frustrates all our labours, and ruins more than the half of mankind. How can I think of leaving any of you under the power of it, and in a condition of so much danger? I fear that my admonition has wanted sufficient earnestness: I have spoken too little, at least with too much coldness. Willingly would I return upon the arguments, could I yet hope to awaken and persuade one soul.

God hath sent forth his prophets in his name, rising up early and sending them; last of all he has sent his own Son. And does any need to persuade you to deliberate about the overtures they bring? Will you turn away from them that spake on earth, and from him that speaketh from heaven?—The matter of their errand respects the salvation of our precious souls, our recovery from vice and misery to holiness and happiness; and are these points of little moment, that we should need to be pressed to consider them? Shall our minds be overcharged with the cares of a present world, in which our interest is becoming every hour less; while the concerns of eternity, and an unseen state into which a few days will translate us, are slighted and forgotten? Why were we endowed with reason, if it is confined in its exercise to the affairs of this transient fleeting scene? Or why is it held to be the glory of
a man,

a man, if it reach no farther than sense? If. xlv. 8, 9. Remember this, and shew yourselves men: bring it again to mind, O ye transgressors. Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is none else.—Vain and precarious is that happiness here which many are deluded with; arising from thoughtlessness, and secured only by inattention. The way to obtain solid enjoyment, is to examine things; to look all around you; to reflect upon your past life; to search into your present condition, and to think how it is likely to fare with you forever; to lay down virtuous resolutions, and prosecute them with vigour. The pain this will give is owing to your past negligence, and very improperly ascribed to consideration: besides it is only in the beginning and will soon issue in solid comfort. This course is not only prudent and adviseable, but absolutely necessary: if you cannot be prevailed with to consider, and become serious, you are undone. Death and judgment are approaching, whether you attend or not; and miserable events they will prove unto those who have not thought of them: What shall be the condition of many who have seldom been serious through life, when the king of terrors approaches them, and they can see nothing beside opportunities which they have neglected, advantages misimproven, and destruction coming like a whirlwind! I like not to follow them beyond the gulf or

figure their case who first lift up their eyes in torment. We cannot figure it in half its horrors: we can form no idea of the awakenings in hell, where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched, and there is no rest day or night. Would that you knew, at least in this your day, the things that belong to your peace, ere yet they be hid from your eyes. Suffer me to persuade you by the mercies or by the terrors of the Lord: May God himself, in mercy to your precious souls, awaken you by his holy Spirit, and testify within you unto the truths attested. 2 Tim. ii. 17. Consider what I say, and the Lord give thee understanding in all things, Amen.

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S E R M O N IX.

ON THE NATURE OF THE GOSPEL DELIVERANCE.

PREACHED AT THE CELEBRATION OF THE LORD'S
SUPPER.

LUKE I. 74, 75.

*That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered
out of the hands of our enemies, might serve him with-
out fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all
the days of our life.*

THESE are the words of Zacharias, the father of John. The angel Gabriel had punished his unbelief with dumbness: Now at the circumcision of the promised son, he is liberated from it; his tongue is loosed, and he spake, and praised God in the inspired prophetic Song before us, from the 68th ver. to the end of the chapter. The accomplishment of the promise made to himself, in the wonderful birth of this child who was to be great in the sight of the Lord, strengthened his faith of the mercy promised to the fathers, and of all that was contained in God's holy covenant with them. He looked that every

thing would come to pass in its season. The promise of the same angel Gabriel to Mary, by this time communicated to him and Elizabeth was now readily embraced; it was in his view as already fulfilled. The blessed babe was born: his work was accomplished: his conquests were finished: the captivity of Jacob turned back, and mankind redeemed. The light that before him was poured upon the scheme of mercy just about to open to the world, and receive a quick completion: the pledge of the divine favour and faithfulness with which this happy family was now distinguished; and the fulness of the Holy Ghost, were ready to overpower his mind. The utterance given was doubtless a relief. Here are the effusions of an enraptured soul, the words in which he broke a silence of many months. They would strike his friends assembled upon this occasion to worship and congratulate with him: and do they not enter into our souls, and impart to us his grateful devout feelings? Could we imbibe the spirit of this holy aged priest, whose lot it was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord, then might we hope suitably to discharge the solemn eucharistical service of this day: we might go to the altar of God, and compass it with joy.

Here are two things in my text requiring our attention.

I. Here

I Here is celebrated the mercy now performed, which had been promised and covenanted to the Fathers, under the notion of a deliverance from the hand of our enemies.

II. Here the important end and purpose of this deliverance is remembered, viz. That we being delivered, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness, before him all the days of our life.

I. Here is celebrated the mercy of God promised and covenanted to our fathers, now performed by Jesus: and it is celebrated under the notion of a deliverance from our enemies.

Mankind are here supposed in the hands of enemies, subdued, detained, and held fast by them; a representation of their state equally just and affecting. Look into the history of the Pagan world; or enquire into the condition of the nations, still unenlightened by the christian revelation, and you find all under the condemning sentence of the law, which all have violated, and subject to the curse; their understanding debased by the observance of the vilest and most impure rites; their will and affections enslaved by the basest lusts; their mind terrified and debilitated by the fear of death, and a superstitious dread of evils to follow after it, which sin had entailed upon them; led captive by Satan at his pleasure. There is a woeful account left us in
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the book of Acts xvii. 16, &c. of the religion of Athens, esteemed the very seat of wisdom. When Paul waited at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry; their very altars inscribed to the Unknown God. The delusion was such, that they could not bear to be corrected. The honest remonstrance of this apostle did but provoke derision. Rome, the only ancient city that rose in fame beyond the other, seems, if possible, in spite of all its conquests, to have been more the slave of superstition and vice. Only observe that shocking character given by the same apostle in his epistle to the Rom. i. 28—32. And if such was the case of those countries famed for wisdom and improvements, the same undoubtedly, or worse, must have been the state of the uncivilized nations spread over the face of the earth, to whose barbarity and ignorance it is owing that we know so little of them with certainty. The rare instances of philosophers and wise men that shone forth at different periods, like bright meteors in the night, served only to render the prevailing darkness more conspicuous. They were held as atheists, and enemies to religion; and they were too few to have any success in reforming the world. What are all the names of this kind we can collect from history, to the successive millions that from the beginning have peopled this globe, and of whom it might be affirmed that

that they were children of darkness and servants of sin. It will be admitted, with regard to the Jews, that they were, in many respects, better than their neighbours, who were strangers to the true God, and aliens to the commonwealth of Israel: and yet the Jews were distinguished much more by their privileges, than by the right use of them. They had their tables of the law from heaven, and teachers from heaven; but they heard not Moses and the prophets. It is melancholy to read in every page of the Old Testament, the unconquerable proneness of this chosen people to idolatry, and the catalogues of gross sins charged upon them in their scriptures. They made void the law of God through their own traditions. Whatever high ideas they had of their liberty, they were little less than others slaves to superstition and to sin. Jesus said to the Jews that believed in him, John viii. 31, 32. If ye continue in my word, ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. All their pretensions to an hereditary freedom he disregarded and repudiated. 34. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. The conclusion of St Paul, who was himself an Hebrew of the Hebrews, is memorable and decisive of their state, Rom. iii. 9. What, then? are we better than they? No, in no wise, both Jews and Gentiles they are all under sin. 16. Destruction and misery are in their ways. Here
then

then are all mankind, under the bondage of corruption, in the hands of cruel enemies; at the same time the generality so sunk and degenerated as to be insensible of the baseness of their servitude, and without any just apprehension of the eternal consequences of it. Satan was the prince of this world; and the kingdoms of it seemed to be his.

In these deplorable circumstances, attended with every possible aggravation, men supposing themselves so much affected with their own state, could do nothing to emancipate themselves. No man could offer a ransom for his brother. There was left no resource, except in the tender mercy of God. Any reasonable hope must originate here. And so it was. The wretchedness of his creatures moved his pity. When it was before him only in his omniscience, he determined their deliverance. He notified his gracious purpose to our first parents, on the back of the fall, and prevented them from despair. It was promised to the fathers. It was the subject of a covenant made with Abraham, which he confirmed by an oath. It was figured out in the law of Moses; and the prophets spoke of it to that people. The wisdom of God saw it fit there should be no general publication of the merciful design till the days of the Messiah, and that the accomplishment of it should be deferred till a certain period fixed in his counsels; —the reasons of which it becomes not us to pry in-

to; Even so, O Father, for so it hath seemed good in thy sight. After human wisdom was put to a full proof, and the unsuccessful efforts of ages showed it could do nothing;—Then, as it is expressed, Gal. iv. 4. When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

The actual manifestation of Jesus to fulfil all the promises of mercy made from the beginning, and to accomplish the deliverance of mankind, was a glorious event. This was the object of longing desire to good men, who were able to decypher the gracious purpose under former darker dispensations, and who saw his day afar off. No wonder if the advent, when it was now at hand, and the child was born who should go before the face of the Lord to prepare his way, was welcomed by good Zacharias in this rapturous song. No wonder if the shepherds, who received a little after the tidings of a Saviour's birth, published them with joy, glorifying and praising God. No wonder if the celestial hosts, friendly to mankind, announced the nativity with seraphic congratulations.

A deliverance out of such a state as that represented, in which mankind had long lain, and for any thing in their power must have for ever continued, cannot but appear great to every thinking mind.

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A de.

A deliverance, in its contrivance and execution, resulting from the unmerited love of God, to them who had nothing amiable or attracting. 1 John iv. 10. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us. A deliverance enhanced beyond all measure by the person commissioned to execute it; his dignity and excellence must be better understood, before we can properly rate it. The dearness to his father of an only begotten Son, whom he delivered up for us, is a strong testimony that we were dear to him, and our souls precious in his sight. What manner of love is this, ver. 9. In this was manifested the love of God toward us because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. He is called an horn of salvation in the song, by which is expressed his power and ability to save. A compleat deliverance, wherein every circumstance of man's wretchedness is provided for. Pardon, to take away our guilt; light, to dispel our darkness; comfort to the doubting; enlargement, strength, and victory to the captive. 1 Cor. i. 30. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. A deliverance, in fine, altogether inestimable, when we consider at what expence of pain and suffering it was effected. The deliverer submitted to endure all the evils to which sin had subjected mankind, that we might be relieved

relieved from them. He conflicted with Satan in his forty days temptation, that in our resistance we might find him a baffled enemy. The world to him was all a wilderness, and his days in it but one temptation, that under him, as our leader, we might overcome the world. If he took away the hand-writing of ordinances that was against us, it was deleted by the nails that pierced his hands and feet: if he bare our sins, it was in his own body on the tree: if he triumphed over principalities and powers, and made a shew of them openly, it was on his cross: if he conquered death, and him that had the power of death, that we might be delivered, who, through fear of death, were all our life time subject to bondage, it was by dying: if he averted the divine displeasure by which we seemed debarred from hope, it was by enduring it in the unknown agonies and sorrows of his own soul. Bloody to him were the victories and conquests which we this day celebrate, whereby he hath delivered us out of the hands of our enemies. All this is far beyond our conception. The striking picture in the vision of the prophet may help out our ideas: *Isaiah lxiii. 1.* Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozra? this that is glorious in his apparel, traveling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. If any thing may still further exalt in our estimation this deliverance

so dearly purchased, it is the full and wise provision made, by the mediation of the Son of God in heaven, by the invisible and powerful agency of his spirit on earth, and by the ministration of his word and ordinances, that it may be effectual to men in the succeeding ages of his church; that their enemies being conquered, they also may be subdued under him, induced to comply with the terms of it, and established in that faith, the end of which is the salvation of their souls.

It will be alledged, I doubt not, that what has been said of this deliverance by Jesus does mighty well in speculation, but is discredited by what we see around us; that in the nations converted to christianity, error and vice do still exceedingly prevail, and men remain in slavery. Alas! that I dare not answer to this by denying the fact. The objection, however, may be greatly invalidated, by attending to the few following things. That wherever the gospel has been received pure and unmixed with the devices and inventions of men, it has obtained a glorious victory over the powers of darkness: that the gospel being a scheme to liberate men only with their own choice, and adapted in every part to free agents, it might be resisted. And being offered to a world lying in wickedness, it was likely that, through the prevailing corruption of men, it would be resisted, and prove ineffectual to many; that Je-

sus

Jesus foresaw and predicted this, that when it should come to pass we might not be offended; that man here, in his best estate, is imperfect; that this is a scene designed for trial; that there are enemies left, as in Israel, for thorns in our side to prove and to try us. Perfection, therefore, is not to be expected under the best dispensation: the best of men will not be found impeccable: all will fail. In fine, let it be considered, that the deliverance of all that believe in Jesus, and receive him is real here. Sin may, through the frailty of human nature, prevail against the true christian; but it shall not have dominion over him. Satan may tempt, and even seduce, but cannot reign. The progress of true christians in this warfare of life can only be gradual; they must go from strength to strength; but victory, though future, is certain: every one of them shall appear before God in Zion. The time of the restitution of all things will at length come; the day of complete redemption. Our Lord will come again: he must reign till he hath put all his enemies under his feet. The saints shall be perfected, and advanced to that state where the enemies with which they have struggled through life, they shall see no more for ever; sin shall not enter, nor once again come near to them; Satan shall be bound up in chains of darkness. Isa. xxxv. The ransomed of the Lord shall come to Zion with songs and everlasting

lasting joy upon their head. The excellency of this deliverance shall no longer be questioned: clouds of witnesses, thousands, and ten thousands shall bear testimony to it. Rev. vii. A great multitude which no man can number shall stand before the throne, and before the Lamb, with white robes, and palms in their hands. They shall ascribe salvation to God and to the Lamb.

II. Here is remembered the important end and purpose of this deliverance, viz. that we might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness, before him all the days of our life. In illustrating this head, I shall consider, 1. The service mentioned, and here prescribed: 2. The manner of this service, as it is defined in these words.

1. We are to serve him.

We are delivered, not only that our hearts should glow with devotional gratitude, that our lips should utter his praise in the most lively expressions of thankfulness, or that we should also frequently assemble together, as now, for the sacramental commemoration of our deliverance; but that we should serve him in our lives. Had our eyes been opened to discern the wretchedness of mankind, as already set forth, and to apprehend the future endless misery to ensue, what would not reasonable creatures have been ready to promise and to do, in order to obtain safety? What would have been thought too much

to be offered as the price of deliverance. They would have been like Israel when, as we read, 1 Sam. xii. 10. They cried unto the Lord and said, We have sinned, because we have forsaken the Lord: but now deliver us out of the hand of our enemies, and we will serve thee. God has of his own mercy delivered us without being importuned by our cries, and shall we not serve him? In delivering us God has remembered his holy covenant. In this view our service is the condition stipulated: Justice, as well as gratitude, bind us to yield it. The mention of a covenant suggests also another idea, that our serving him is necessary, in order to our being really benefited by the deliverance wrought: the condition must be performed in order to our obtaining the blessing. In creating us with these souls and capacities, he laid the foundation of a right to our service, that cannot be alienated. By the bounties of his providence, whereby he supplies and feeds the springs of life, this is corroborated and rendered entire. After all that the best men can do, they give to him only what is his own, and can never discharge the debt they owe him. When mankind are sunk into the deepest degeneracy, and slaves to sin, his claim to their service does not upon this account cease: they are debtors to him not the less that they have rendered themselves insolvent. By redemption, he asserts a right that was always his own: he restores us at the same time to a capacity of yielding it.

it. When he pays our debt to divine justice, he would secure our debt of service, and furnish us for rendering it. Tit. ii. 14. He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. The deliverance wrought for us by the Messiah, translates us into his kingdom; and so we become his subjects, and bound to serve him, although there had been no prior title. The ransom he paid for us makes us altogether his; if this cannot make us more his than all men are, it should make us more willing to be his. He has purchased the service from us that was always due. 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20. Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. If there is no other that can enter a better claim to your service, or has laid you under greater obligations, then permit me to require on his part, and as an ambassador in Christ's stead, that ye yield yourselves unto him. In the sacrament, under the solemnities which he has appointed, acknowledge him your Master, and renounce all other lords. Declare that his service is your choice. May I not hold you as witnesses against yourselves, that ye have chosen you the Lord to serve him? Is not the united voice of communicants the same as that anciently was of the congregation of Israel, when good Joshua before his death conducted them in covenanting with God. Josh.

xxiv. 22, 24. We are witnesses. The Lord our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey. Is not every one ready to express a willing consent in the language of the Psalmist, cxvi. 16. O Lord, truly I am thy servant: I am thy servant, and the son of thy handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds. And with St Paul, Acts ix. 6. Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?

2. We are to serve him in holiness and righteousness.

I need not read to you the book of the covenant, as Moses did in the audience of Israel. Here it is abridged. In assenting unto this, you in effect say with that people, Exod. xxiv. 7. All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient. The two words used here, and in other parts of scripture, have a reference to the two tables of the law. Holiness comprehends the duties of the first, or all that we owe to God; and righteousness those of the second, or all that is due to our neighbour. Holiness stands first in this summary. The dignity of God, the immediate object of it, and our relation to him, gives it a just precedency: we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. Righteousness follows the other, as it ought to do; the obligation of it arises from the other; and it is ever best discharged, and most acceptably, when it carries in it a regard to God. Righteousness is every thing due to men;

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not only the exercise of justice, which they are entitled to, and may claim; but charity in all its extent. This is a debt to men, not indeed upon their own account, but for God and Christ's sake, which, though they cannot sue for, yet he has commanded and enforced. Here is fixed the nature, the order, and the measure of the Christian service. We may never separate what God hath strictly joined. We may not disarrange the order which God hath established among his own laws. We may not mutilate or take away from them. Holiness and righteousness must go together. They are not only united in the song of Zacharias, but are found together in the character of himself and his excellent spouse. They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. St Paul gives the same account of our duty, as reaching the two tables of God's law, with a precision and minuteness that cannot be misinterpreted. Tit. ii. 11, 12. For the grace of God that bringeth salvation, hath appeared unto all men; teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world: And it was his daily study that they should be united in his practice; Acts xxiv. 16. And herein do I exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men. The expression in the song, that we
might

might serve him in holiness and righteousness, suggests that we are to perform these duties with the spirit of servants, who cannot imagine they acquire any merit by doing what they are bound to. When our best endeavours are used, we do but what we ought to do: we never can go beyond this, and after all are unprofitable servants. The expression likewise suggests, that as the servant depends upon his master for all that may be needed for executing the work appointed him, so are we to look unto God, and humbly to expect that he will furnish us for all that he requires of us. Ps. cxxiii. 2. Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hands of their masters, so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God.

Such is the service Christians are called to, reasonable, easy, delightful, perfective of human nature; contrived to employ our noblest powers; ripening us for happiness greater and more permanent than any to be found below; of itself engendering hope. Shall I disparage it by any comparison with the service of sin? That is a hard debasing drudgery: His yoke is easy and his burden light—And in the issue how different? By one important interrogatory they are put in the scale and held forth that we may judge Rom. vi. 21, 22. What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death. But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God,

ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. Were it not for a strange delusion, for a security that seems judicial, the wicked would not dwell in the tents of sin. This service which every wise man would chuse, and would render freely, is the return which God requires, and will accept for the deliverance he has wrought for us. How much goodness is there in this stipulation, that we subject ourselves to such a master, and employ our days in such a service! What is there here to touch ingenuity, to dispose and constrain us to offer ourselves unto the Lord willingly! My Lord, O King, I am thine, and all that I have. There will be a joy in the solemn transaction of this day, resembling that of Judah in the reign of the good king Aza, 2 Chr. xv. 12, 14, 15. They entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers, with all their heart and with all their soul: and they sware unto the Lord with a loud voice, and with shouting, and with trumpets, and with cornets. And all Judah rejoiced at the oath; for they had sworn with all their heart, and fought him with their whole desire, and he was found of them.

PART SECOND.

THE manner in which this service must be performed, is defined in three particulars.

1. We

1. We must serve God in holiness and righteousness, without fear.

By this is excluded a superstitious fear of God, a dastardly fear arising from the sense of our own weakness. The tendency of all which is, to disarm and debilitate the soul, and render us inactive, in so far as they prevail, the service we yield is involuntary, and cannot be acceptable to God, for God loveth a cheerful giver, 2 Cor. ix. 7.

We may not indeed lay aside fear for the deity. Mal. i. 6. If I be a master, where is my fear. There is a fear of him so essential in his service, that the whole of religion is denominated from it, in the Old Testament, the fear of the Lord: and the characteristic of good men is, They that fear God. In the New Testament, and under a more full dispensation of the Spirit,—wherein it is said of Christians, Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have received the spirit of adoption,—fear is not excluded, but remains a necessary principle of duty. Heb. xii. 28 Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. Even the better promises of this better covenant, the great objects of faith and hope, are urged as motives of fear. Heb. iv. 1 Let us therefore fear lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come
short

short of it. This fear, or reverence, has its foundation on the divine perfections, and must therefore be for ever indispensable. This fear, lest we offend him, and incur his displeasure, or forfeit his favour, is the attendant of real love, and taking its rise from this, is a filial affection, which it is our duty to cherish and cultivate. But that fear which we must be without, is a superstitious dread of God, springing from false ideas of the Supreme Being, as cruel, implacable, and arbitrary. Now God performing his mercy, remembering his covenant, and delivering mankind by his own Son, is such a display of goodness and faithfulness as should correct all this misapprehension, and conciliate love and trust. Beholding his glory in this view, we may reason away all our fears, as the wife of Manoah did those of her superstitious husband, Judg. xiii. 23. If the Lord were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a meat offering, and a burnt offering at our hands, neither would he have shewed us all these things, nor would he, as at this time, have told us such things as these. Our deliverance is mentioned first in the song, that our service, being the return we make to God for it, may proceed from gratitude, and a sense of obligation which it tends to excite, and so may be without fear.

There is also a fear of enemies, which is reasonable, and may be indulged to a certain degree, so as

to engage us to watch and pray, and take unto ourselves the whole armour of God. But when it makes us distrustful of God, when it magnifies difficulties, like the spies which Moses sent to search out the land of Canaan, and makes us desert our duty as cowards, or discharge it with faintness and timid irresolution, then it becomes culpable and sinful. God claims a willing and resolved service. The deliverance wrought for us, is such a pledge of his love as gives the strongest assurance. He will never leave us to be destroyed by sin or Satan, out of whose hands he has rescued us, if we honestly resist them. Psa. cxviii. 11. They compassed me about; yea, they compassed me about; but in the name of the Lord will I destroy them. Moses said to the people, when they were affrighted for the sons of Anak, and meditated a return into Egypt, Numb. xiv. 9. The Lord is with us, fear them not, Great is our security, that he who hath delivered will interpose for us. John xxviii. 29. I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand: my Father that gave them me is greater than all, and none is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.

Finally, with regard to fear produced by the sense of our weakness and insufficiency, this has a real foundation in human nature, and may in a certain degree be allowed, where it teaches us humility.

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Rom. xi. 20. Thou standest by faith, be not high minded, but fear. That diffidence is allowable which sends us to God, and quickens us in our devotions: this is the meaning of that precept of the Apostle, Phil. ii. 12, 13. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure; and this fear urges you, and will send you to him, who worketh in you. But the same fear in the excess is culpable, where it casts down or benumbs the soul, and in place of stimulating or quickening, leaves it in a state of actionless despair. This becomes not Christians, for whose weakness God has provided such spiritual supplies, 1 John iv. 4. Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. Phil. iv. 13. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. The spirit of God promised and given unto them that ask him, of itself subdues or moderates our fear. The fruits of it are love, and joy, and peace, which cheer and exhilarate the mind, so that the most willing and animated service may be expected. Good David encouraged himself in the service of God, after a temporal deliverance obtained, by the pleasing remembrance of the divine goodness, and opposed trust in God to all disquieting fears. He has herein taught us how to improve a spiritual deliverance

liverance: the disposition in which we, who are delivered out of the hands of our enemies, ought to serve God, as here prescribed, is happily expressed in his words, Psa. lvi. 12, 13. Thy vows are upon me, O God: I will render praises unto thee. For thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living.

Love to God is the noblest and most ingenious principle of duty. Fear, so far as it springs not from this, or is not founded in our nature, and the condition of a state of trial, is to be discouraged. By contemplating the goodness of God, especially in delivering us, we are to cultivate love. As this gains in its power, the influence of the other will abate. By our endeavours after this, we do our best to serve, as we are here required, without fear. The love of God will diffuse itself, and by degrees engross the whole soul, and animate the whole conduct. This is the most advanced state of the Christian's progress. His service is then like that of angels, glorious, and exalted. 1 John iv. 16. And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Ver. 18. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear.

2. We must serve God in holiness and righteousness before him.

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Immensify

Immensify is one of the attributes of the deity. Heaven is called his seat, his throne, his habitation; there he is gloriously present, by displays of himself peculiar to that region of bliss. He is graciously present with good men, when he distinguishes them with sensible tokens of his favour, imparting to them light, and comfort, and life, and strength: He dwelleth with them that are of an humble and contrite spirit. Besides which, there is an essential presence of God, in respect whereof he is every where. 1 Kings viii. 27. Behold the heaven, and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee. Jer. xxiii. 24. Do not I fill heaven and earth, saith the Lord? Isa. lxvi. 1. Where is the house that ye build unto me, and where is the place of my rest? Acts xvii. 27, 28. He is not far from every one of us, for in him we live, and move, and have our being. Psa. cxxxix. 7—13. Now in the text there is a reference unto this last. We are not only to credit it as certain, but to have the truth much in our minds: under the impressions of it we are to serve God, and to discharge all the duties of holiness and righteousness. Good men in every age have acted from this principle. We read of Moses, Heb. xi. 27. That he endured, as seeing him that is invisible. David, Psa. xvi. 8. declares, I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. It is said of Zacharias and Elizabeth, Luke

i. 6. They were both righteous before God. St Paul declared in the Jewish council, Acts xxiii. 1. I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day. Accordingly it was the general description of good men, that they walked with God, or before God. Nay, it enters into the character of religion itself, which is denominated by the Apostle James, i. 27. Pure religion and undefiled, before God and the Father. This is the principle we are called to espouse. As the servant behaves with respect, and exerts his best endeavours when the master is with him; so in the presence of our master in heaven, we are to maintain the greatest reverence, and awe of him, and to discharge our duty to him with diligence and ardour. And considering we serve a master who sees the heart, our care must extend to the frame and temper of the inward man. Rom. xii. 11. Be not slothful in business, but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. The presence of God at all times encompassing us, and his pure eye penetrating the thoughts and intents of the mind; this is more, a thousand times, than to have a master here, a father of our flesh, or a prince of the earth, standing by us: this requires that we glorify God, not by any affected or outward conformity to his law, but in body and in spirit, with singleness of heart, being, as the wise man expresses it, Prov. xxiii. 17. In the fear of the Lord all day long. This principle must

go with us unto every place, and consecrate every part of the service we perform unto God, whether of holiness or righteousness. When we enter into the temple of God to worship him, it should be with the awful reflection of good Jacob, Gen. xxviii. 17. This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. And wheresoever we go, we should make him present, by preserving and by living under a sense of his presence; surely the Lord is in this place. When we fall down to worship him, when we render thanks, when we make supplication, it should all be done according to the ordinary phrase of scripture, before God. When we hear his word, it should be with the frame of that audience in the house of good Cornelius, Acts x. 33. Now, therefore, are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God. When we communicate with all true Christians in the sacrament of our Lord's supper, then we eat and drink in his presence. When we publish the truth, it should be with a secret appeal to the God of truth, Gal. i. 20. Behold, before God I lie not. When we do our alms, it should be before our Father, which seeth in secret. As that presence is ever with us, so the sense of it should pass with us into all the relations of life, and tincture our whole behaviour, agreeably to the exhortation of the Apostle, Col. iii. 17—24. Had they who contented themselves

themselves with a decent outward form of religion, only sought after this inward devotedness to God through life, how happy might they now have been in a conscious sense of his favour, and in place of a fair reputation among men, which verily is all their reward, they might have entertained reasonable and well grounded hope toward God. Had they who have gone the formal round of commanded duties for a long course of time, only served with the earnestness intended here, as before God, how far by this time might they have been advanced in the way to heaven, and in a meetness for it. They who through the neglect of this are still in a sort of childhood, and babes in Christ Jesus, might, by greater fervency, have made a considerable progress toward Christian perfection. He that hath delivered us out of the hands of our enemies, and made us his own by saving us, hath affixed this condition, that he might appropriate hereby our services to himself. In estimating what we do, he will regard our inward intention. And those duties only which we have performed as before him, he will approve and accept: others will be rejected; have ye done them unto me, even unto me. Psa. cxvi. 8, 9. Thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living.

3dly.

3dly. We must serve him all the days of our life.

This is the term of our service. It must begin how soon we become capable of it. It must continue with as little interruption as the present state will admit, and end only with life. There are seasons when we are to leave the world in a manner, and and give ourselves up to the exercises of devotion and worship: there are seasons due to our brethren, when their concerns almost wholly engage us: there are seasons and occasions that sometimes occur, when we are called upon to exert a peculiar zeal that we may abound in the work of the Lord. These seasons are to be observed, and the obligations of them faithfully complied with. At the same time, we are to remember that the service of God is a perpetual engagement, and will find work for us while we live. Holiness and righteousness are to employ all our days. This is well described to us in the exemplary resolution of good Job, xxvii. 3—6. All the while my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils, my lips shall not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit; till I die I will not remove my integrity from me; my righteousness I hold fast and will not let it go; my heart shall not reproach me, so long as I live.

The first and earliest of our days are to be given to God, how soon reason so far opens, as to show the obligations of man, and conscience distinguishes
betwixt

betwixt good and evil. This morning of life must be sacred to his service. This is the flower of our time and the most proper season for beginning our work. God's grace is then most forward and ready to assist us; the impressions of it then enter deepest, while the heart is soft and tender, and remain most lasting and durable. This is the critical time of life, which fixes most men in the course they follow ever after. Ec. xii. 1. Remember now thy creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them. This service must occupy the maturer and riper years of our life: the vigour and prime, not less than the dawn of life is due to God, and is chiefly valuable, as it furnishes us for promoting, to greater advantage, his glory and the purpose of our being, by doing good. The follies and vanities of youth, which few escape, are then to be corrected and compensated. The deficiencies and failings incident to the following hastening decline of years are to be provided for. Isa. lv. 6. Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near. This service must employ the evening of life, and our most advanced years. Our obligations grow as we proceed: our strength and the sprightliness of our mind will abate, but temptation will at the same time lose of its force; and the passions that are ready to mislead and
overpower

overpower us, will lose of their impetuosity. The time for working becomes short; having born the burden and heat of the day, 'tis pity you should not hold out a little longer. The object of your faith and hope comes nearer; the intervening space is daily less. With you it is now or never. John ix. 4. I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh when no man can work. Jer. xiii. 16. Give glory to the Lord your God, before he causeth darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains; and while ye look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness. In the gayer time of life, you must not be diverted or allured from the service of God, or thoughtlessly ramble into that dissipation which is too common. In manhood you must not be the servants of passion, nor yield to the temptations of Satan, if he should present the kingdoms of the earth and the glory of them. No man can serve two masters;—Ye cannot serve God and Mammon. In old age, you must not desist from, nor grow weary of the service of God. This world ever warps closest about the hearts of those who are soon to leave it. Why, by becoming remiss should you endanger or lose what you have wrought? or why allow the cares of this world to warp close about your hearts, when you are soon to leave it? Fill up well and usefully with his service the whole circle: leave

no vacant unemployed space. By diligence and activity redeem the time that has necessarily been lost, and provide for interruptions that yet will break in upon you, if it please God that you live long. The ordinary functions of life, eating, drinking, and the like, will necessarily run away with a considerable part of it. Seek to turn this into a part of his service, by acting and living under an habitual sense of duty to him. Do all you can by counsel, precept, example, and every way to form others for serving him, when you shall have quitted the stage, and so be instrumental in procuring to him from others, what you have failed to yield. This is suggested in the charge of Moses unto Israel, Deut. iv. 9, 19. Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently; lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons and thy sons sons; that they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children. The deliverance which God has wrought for us, out of the hands of our enemies, founds a right to our services, which will bind us to him through time and through eternity. It will remain ever the same. Our debt to him is only acknowledged by any service we are able to render: it can never be discharged, nor even diminished. The perpetuity of our service is requisite

to make it in any way correspondent to our obligation unto him who hath remembered his holy covenant with us, and the mercy promised from the beginning to the fathers. In all our engagements to God, it is usual as well as most reasonable, to devote ourselves entirely and for ever. Come and let us join ourselves unto the Lord in a perpetual covenant, never to be forgotten. His service, however entered into and adhered to from a sense of debt and obligation, is of such a nature that it will endear and bind itself upon us. A good man who has tasted the sweetness of it would not go out free: it is not his jubilee to be liberated: the only freedom here he covets, is more enlargement of heart to run in the ways of it: this he esteems the liberty of the sons of God. The service stipulated is bounded by the term of this transitory short life, but our prospects do not terminate here. He who hath wrought this glorious deliverance for us, never meant that we should just learn to serve him, and habituate ourselves to duty for so short a space, and then drop into nothing. There is every reasonable presumption that he intends us for higher, more delightful service, and for an endless duration, to which this is only preparatory: for a length of days, like the days of heaven. The promises of scripture relieve us from every thought of annihilation—so much the abhorrence of our nature, from the dread of
future

future misery,—and animate to present duty by encouraging future boundless hopes. 1 Cor. xv. 58. Therefore my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as you know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord. Gal vi. 9. And let us not be weary in well-doing; for in due season we shall reap if we faint not. 1 Pet. i. 13. Wherefore, gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end, for the grace that is to be brought unto you, at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Rev. ii. 10. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

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PHIL. IV. 11.

— *I have learned in whatsoever state I am, there-
with to be content.*

THE writings of the apostle Paul are eminently distinguished by a spirit of mirth and chearfulness. This proceeded not from any thing favourable or prosperous in outward circumstances. From his first conversion to the faith of Jesus, till he died a martyr, he lived a stranger to external felicity: his lot was destitute and afflicted beyond that of any of his brethren; almost beyond example. In labours he was more abundant; in daily and nightly perils; in stripes above measure; in prisons more frequent. Most of his epistles were written when he was in bonds, and might have been dated from the jail. The uninterrupted joy, then, which is his characteristic, must have arisen from within; and we can be at no loss to find out its source, when we are told he had a contented mind; a frame disposed for every condition, of affluence or want, prosperity or adversity.

verſity. I have learned in whatſoever ſtate I am, therewith to be content.

The ſaints at Philippi had communicated with his affliction by ſending a ſeaſonable remittance. This in the preceding context he thankfully acknowledges, and takes occaſion, at the ſame time, to remember former liberalities, in which he owns they had outdone all the other churches which he had planted. But he will not have them to miſinterpret his gratitude, as if he had been unhappy or impatient under the ſtraits from which they had relieved him. He avers the contrary. Their charity was fruit which would abound to their own account: Their charity was an odour of a ſweet ſmell, a ſacrifice acceptable, well pleaſing to God. For theſe reaſons chiefly he deſired it, and delighted in it; whereas with regard to his own wants, he gave them to know, that, however great they might be, they were always tolerable to him, and his mind was ſuited to his condition. Not that I ſpeak in reſpect of want: for I have learned, &c. Here is a diſpoſition which would have made him happy, if the Philippians had been unkind, and ſhut up their bowels of compaſſion; which made him ſelf-ſufficient, as the word content might be rendered, i. e. not independent of God, but independent of the world: A diſpoſition not innate, or born with him; but which he had acquired by application, exerciſe, and diſcipline; and which

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he was able to maintain in every state of life, through Christ who strengthened him. From the experience and the example of the apostle, we see contentment is only to be acquired by care and study, and that it may be learned. Here also we are called to observe its excellence, and enticed to learn the same lesson. This will certainly give solid comfort, whatever the outward lot may be. He that has gathered wealth, and collected all other the like materials, may yet be without happiness; but he who has learned contentment, may say with St Paul, I have all and abound. Pf. cxxvii. 2. So giveth he his beloved rest.

That I may contribute my poor endeavours to instruct you in this blessed art, and so become the helper of your joy, it is proposed,

I. To explain the nature of contentment, in which the apostle declares he had made such proficiency.

II. To state the arguments to contentment, which may serve to show the study of it is our duty; and at the same time, if rightly pondered, may, through the blessing of God, help us to the attaining of it.

III. To lay down some useful rules to be observed in order to facilitate and render more easy this important lesson of Christian morality.

I. We propose to explain the nature of contentment.

It may be defined, an habit or temper of mind, well pleased with its outward condition in life,
which

which it considers as the allotment of divine providence; receiving thankfully what is good, and acquiescing chearfully in circumstances of want or adversity. It stands opposed to impatience, covetousness, and envy. This is an excellent and high attainment. The apostle had sought it with care and with success; and we are all called as disciples of Christ, after his example to cultivate it, coveting earnestly this best gift. But where we are to learn a lesson at once so rare, and of so great importance, the short description now given is not sufficient. I shall therefore, in the way of explication, direct your attention to four particulars which go to make up the nature of contentment, and which, if well considered, may open to us a more full and exact knowledge of our duty.

1. Contentment respects our outward lot and condition in life.

There are not a few given up to sin and sense, involved in deep guilt, and liable to endless and extreme misery; and yet they are at ease, like the Zidonians, living carelessly, undisturbed either with remorse or fear. Such are children of hell and wrath, not examples of contentment. Their's is a lesson not to be learned, but to be unlearned at our utmost peril. There are many, too, to be found among the servants of God, who, though they could never be reconciled to the desperate state of these servants of

sin,

fin, are yet easily satisfied with themselves, if they have only escaped the gross pollutions that are in the world, or have made some inconsiderable progress in the divine life. But neither the security of one class, nor the sloth of the other, deserves the name of contentment. The apostle, after all his attainments in goodness, which have not often been paralleled, was insatiate: He was not even content with his contentment; but where his proficiency was greatest, even there he would still make further advances, ch. iii. 12, 13. The province of contentment lies not at all in the spiritual estate. It respects the outward man's externals, and the things of this life are the sole objects of it.

It is needless perhaps to mention the nice distinction which some have made betwixt patience and contentment; as if the former respected affliction in general, and the latter only one particular kind of it, viz. poverty and indigence. But it is most material to inform you, that contentment is to be taken in a much larger sense. It not only comprehends patience, and respects affliction of every kind, but there is room for it also in the most prosperous estate. One who was to speculate and form a judgment, without any acquaintance with mankind, would hardly suppose that the rich or great could have any concern in this lesson. But who, that lives in this world, is not satisfied of the con-

trary? Prosperity and affluence are attended with squeamish delicacy. He that has much, cannot endure the want of any thing; and to him the best things often lose their relish. They who are blessed with what may be called a competency, unto whom God has sent neither riches nor poverty, who from a middle station can make their impartial observations upon these who move above them in the higher spheres of life, as well as upon the inferior ranks of men, will acknowledge it difficult to pronounce concerning them, which are most deficient here, and which need most to be instructed in this great art; whether it is harder to reconcile the rich to what he possesses, or the poor to his wants; the prosperous to his affluence, or the distressed to his afflictions.

And let it further still be remembered here, that as contentment respects the outward condition, whether of prosperity or adversity, so it must descend unto every circumstance in it. The dissatisfaction so common among men, which blasts their happiness, and eats out the very life of life, will be found to arise not from their lot in general, but from certain particulars in it, so small and minute, that they can seldom be discerned by the eye of others. Here, then, in conquering these, is our principal work: here lies the difficulty: *Hic labor: Hoc opus.* To be satisfied with these things that are in themselves pleasing, is not thank-worthy: it is something natural,

ral, which hardly needs to be learned. But to overcome our reluctance to what is offensive, to suit the mind to these things in the lot, that are harsh and disagreeable, this is the only proof of duty, and the proper exercise of contentment. The apostle, in giving an account of it here, and stating the objects of it, signifies by the very manner of expression that it reached every thing in his lot, ver. 12. I know both how to abound, and how to suffer need.

2. As contentment respects our outward condition, so it requires a chearful complacence in it; and in this chiefly the essence of it lies.

We are not to call good, evil, and evil, good; to know no difference betwixt pleasure and pain. This the Stoicks of old affected; but we have not so learned Christ. Human nature is still to possess its feelings; and contentment is so far from lying in the suppression of these, that, if they were wanting, there could be no place for it. Nay, we may not only be sensibly affected with outward evils, but when these are great or sudden, the mind for a season will be greatly discomposed, and good thoughts routed, as it were, and dissipated: and for this too, as well as for our natural feelings, permission is given. He who knows our frame, and remembers that we are dust, graciously indulges to our natural frailty the first transports of grief and sorrow. Scripture supposes these sad and tender occasions, and

prescribes for them; calling us to pray, while the heart cannot yet be raised to the lightsome joyful notes of praise. Jam. v. 13. Is any among you afflicted? let him pray.—Again, contentment does not bind up our hands from virtuous labour, or oblige us to an indolent submission to evils which may be removed. Every thing may be attempted to better our circumstances, and advance us in rank, which can be done without injuring and supplanting our neighbour, or sinning against our God. Scripture, by its precepts, hallows, and by its promises encourages a lawful industry. The hand of the diligent maketh rich: The hand of the diligent shall bear rule: The soul of the diligent shall be made fat: Seest thou a man diligent in his business; he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men. Prov. x. 4. xii. 24. xiii. 4. xxii. 29.

But after all these allowances are made, there is room for that complacency of mind in which contentment lies. We are permitted to discern between what is sweet and what is bitter in our lot; the business of contentment is, that we be pleased with both. We may be overpowered with any signal calamity, when it comes without a forerunner, like an armed man: But then how soon the first discomfiture is over, and there is time for recollection, we must calmly and heartily approve of all that has befallen us. The language of contentment is, It is good
for

for me that I have seen affliction. We may do what our hand findeth to do in the way of honest industry, to remedy what is afflictive, and procure the good things of this life. But then the heart must be discharged of fruitless anxiety. Contentment must teach us to be careful for nothing, to rest from our labours, and to think that we have enough, when we have done enough. The small things, as well as the great in your lot, we have said are the objects of contentment; and they must also be the objects of complacence. This must descend to every particular. What is that which, like the moth in the garment, frets and gnaws your soul? To that you must be reconciled. The saying of the apostle will apply here: He that offendeth in one point is guilty of all. You are but the more inexcusable, that, amidst so many good things, you cannot bruik one thing that is unpalatable. Neither is it enough that you are satisfied with your condition, and the several circumstances of it, so as to account it tolerable: you must even look upon it as the fittest and best for you in this present world. While you move under it grudgingly, as a burden heavy to be borne, and make it not your choice, you come short of your duty. Such an entire complacence in these things which have long been offensive, and against which the heart has set itself, is like the loving of enemies, a difficult attainment: It is a hard saying, who

who can bear it? But until this is reached, we can never say with St Paul in our text, I have learned. Far less can we proceed to the higher exercises of joy and thanksgiving, unto which we are called by the apostolic precepts. 1 Thess. v. 16, 18.

3. It is necessary that this complacence in our outward lot, proceed from a principle of piety, and carry in it a dutiful regard to God.

The word rendered contentment here, and in other places of the New Testament, literally signifies self-sufficiency; meaning, we suppose, that this is a temper, by virtue of which we may be satisfied from ourselves, and with what has fallen to our share here, independently of the world, but by no means importing a sufficiency independent of God. There is no real self-enjoyment, where God is excluded; and there is no true contentment, where he is not expressly regarded. There is an insensibility, or will you call it a firmness and equality of mind, with which some persons are naturally endowed, so that good and evil come alike to them; they are not much elated by the one, nor greatly discomposed by the other. Such persons are wonderfully fitted for the vicissitudes of this various and uncertain state. But this is not the complacence essential to duty, and after which we are enquiring. The apostle here speaks not of what was constitutional, but of what he had acquired by study; not of what he was born with,

with, but of what he had learned. Contentment is a religious exercise or habit; but without a regard to God it could not be so denominated: that is no part of his service, where the pious intention of the heart is wanting. Contentment, like all the other parts of religion, is a reasonable service: the complacence, therefore, in which it lies, must be founded in reason and principle: we must see our lot to be the appointment of an all-ruling and wise providence, and be pleased with it because it is so. To learn contentment is the duty of a Christian; but a regard to God, a sovereign and prevailing regard unto him, is the foundation of all Christian morality: on this basis the whole rests. Our blessed Saviour has expressly taught, Matt. xxii. 27. That to love the Lord our God with all our heart, is the first and great commandment of the law. His apostle requires, 1 Cor. x. 31. That whatsoever we do, whether we eat or drink, we do all to the glory of God. And contentment is in scripture especially urged from religious motives; such as that, Heb. xiii. 5. Be content with such things as ye have; for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.

4. In fine, it is requisite and essential to contentment, that the complacence in our outward lot be constant and habitual.

To bring you for once to allow that it is well with you, and to look with a favourable eye upon the
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cross circumstances in your lot, were hardly worth our labouring. It is not a formal striking of hands with what is offensive; it is not an agreement, like a political peace entered into between nations, which begin to be infringed how soon it is made; it is not a momentary reconciliation, to which I would persuade; but a pious, chearful complacence in your condition that is permanent and enduring. When the reasonableness and importance of this duty has been fairly stated, perhaps counsel and argument have had an effect. When you have seen others in deplorable and destitute circumstances, upon the comparison you have blessed yourselves, and perceived a relish in what was wont to be most disagreeable. When you have turned toward you the favourable side of things, the prospect has reflected a gleam of joy upon the mind. Or in a vein of good humour, which, like the sunshine, casts a chearful light upon every object, your heart has experienced a full complacence. This may have been the case: but after all, if you can say no more, you are yet strangers to true content. It is not enough that you have your gay and chearful seasons, when murmuring and repining and envy are banished, or rather interrupted: It is not enough that you are pleased with the divine dispensations, when, more properly speaking, you are pleased with yourselves. The precepts requiring contentment are always binding,
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and more especially at those times, and in those circumstances, which you suppose may excuse you from it. The reasons of it always bind; the motives of it always weigh; and the circumstances in our condition which displease, only prove and try their influence. The advantages of contentment are such only as follow where it is habitual. He that sows sparingly, shall here reap also sparingly; and there is no time in which it can serve any valuable purpose, and be vindicated by any solid reason, that you should have leave to say with the Jewish prophet, that you do well to be angry. It was the habit of contentment, and not the act only, which was the study and attainment of our holy apostle. In whatsoever state, every where, and in all things, and consequently at all times, I have learnt to be content.

Having thus attempted to explain the nature of contentment, we proceed,

II. To state the arguments which may serve to show that the study of contentment is our duty, and at the same time, if seriously pondered, may, through the divine blessing, help us to the attaining of it.

Of these arguments there are five different sources, which we shall consider separately. The first is,

1. The doctrine of a divine providence, from which there arise three powerful arguments to contentment.

(1.) The providence of God orders and disposes all things in this world, descending even to those that are most minute and inconsiderable.

Atheism gives us a very black and dismal view of our condition here; that either it is settled by inexorable fate, and things cannot be otherwise than they are, or that it is merely fortuitous, and, by the justlings of blind chance, may soon be worse. No wonder if this produced perpetual discontent. The ancients, who maintained that the divine administrations respected only kingdoms and empires without coming lower, stript the doctrine of a providence of every thing that could yield comfort, and their error differed little from unbelief. No wonder if they also were out of humour, and often displeased. But to use the apostle's words, We, brethren, are not in darkness; we are not of the night, nor of darkness. We know that God rules in the kingdoms of men, giving them to whomsoever he will; and at the same time, without distraction, extends his paternal care over all his creatures, directing all their concerns. Isa. xl. 28. Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?—This truth is fraught with comfort, and wonderfully suited to persuade all to contentment. It is taught by our Saviour, and laid down as an argument to trust in God, and may be used
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with no less propriety to enforce the duty now mentioned, since the two are inseparable; Luke xii. 24, 27. xxviii. 6, 7. Our dissatisfactions, provoked by something in our condition, are wrecked upon ourselves, and we commonly trace them no further: but this truth instructs us in their malignity, by showing that they terminate against God. That which is the ground of vexation and uneasiness fell not to your share by any oversight, but was expressly designed for you. In being displeased with it, you are displeased with him that disposed your lot, and he that is discontent, can never be acquitted from the charge of impiety. This doctrine teaches you that if the Almighty had not another pupil upon earth, if you was placed alone in the midst of it, you could not be more the object of his care. Why then should you be discontent? Or how can you be so, without affronting and impeaching him?—There is something in the very first reflection upon this doctrine, which, meeting with a pious mind where there is any religious awe or fear of the Deity, will produce the sentiment express'd by Eli. When the dreadful ruin of his family was foretold by Samuel, and his ears yet tingled with the message, the aged priest said, 1 Sam. iii. 18. It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good.

(2.) This all ruling providence is administered by him who is our rightful Lord and Sovereign.

Betwixt the kings of the earth and their subjects there is necessarily a mutual dependance, and there are mutual obligations: they owe protection to us, as we owe obedience to them, and failure on their part may sometimes justify a revolt on ours. But here is only an imperfect shadow of the relation in which we stand to God, as the subjects of his kingdom. We are his property; the sheep of his pasture and the work of his hands; and his dealings with us can never excuse one disaffected thought. Our being is his gift; his visitation preserves our spirits; all the enjoyments of life are the fruits of his bounty. What have we that we have not received? With what shadow of right can we quarrel with his dispensations; or by what ties is he bound to us; The whole world may be challenged in the apostle's words Rom. xi. 35. Who hath first given, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?—It is his province, as the monarch and the ruler of the world, to assign to each of us his station: Instead of complaining that we are not all ministers of state, and that we do not all fill the higher offices of dignity and trust, it becomes us chearfully to take our post, and dutifully to maintain it, till death bring our discharge from him, acknowledging his prerogative in the words of St Paul, Acts. xvii. 26. He hath made of one blood all nations of men, for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before

fore appointed, and the bounds of their habitation. By this argument the apostle vindicates certain passages in the divine administrations that would seem most hard and arbitrary. Of God's loving Jacob, and hating Esau, and preferring the one to the other, when both were yet unborn, and of his raising up Pharaoh that by his signal destruction he might be a monument of his power, the account is given in the following words which may well silence our complaints, and reconcile us to the lesser inequalities of our lot, Rom. ix. 20. Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour. The same argument is used by our Saviour, and beautifully illustrated in the parable of the householder, Matt. xx. 1. The Lord of the vineyard personates the Almighty, and returns such an answer to one of the repining labourers as may well put an end to all querulous complaining at his distributions, Ver. 13, 14, 15. Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way, I will give unto this last even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil because I am good?—The consideration of God's sovereignty over us shews us that,

as our discontent terminates against him, so it is in the highest degree criminal: it is treason and rebellion. Murmurers are emphatically denominated Num. xvii. 10. Children of rebellion. How foolish is it in us, and insolent, to rise up against him who formed us in the womb? We may plunge ourselves deep in guilt and misery; but he that sits in heaven will laugh: The Lord will hold us in derision. Is. xlv. 9. Wo to him that strive with his Maker: let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth. We can do nothing to defeat or disturb his measures. All the rebellion we are capable of, is by the disaffection and reluctance of the heart: this is our utmost; and indeed further than this the devils cannot go. Discontent is especially unsuitable to the character and profession of Christians; and, among these of the household of faith, is attended with circumstances of special aggravation. Shall we, that every day pray, as our blessed Master taught us, that his kingdom may come, yet harbour inward disaffection? We entreat that his will may be done in earth as it is done in heaven, and do we wish for the contrary; or are we displeased because our prayers are heard?

(3.) It follows, in fine, from the doctrine of a providence, that the world is governed, and all things in it directed with infinite wisdom and goodness.

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The thought of God's sovereignty is sufficient to still our clamours, and obliges to a tacit and quiet submission: but when we further reflect that infinite goodness and wisdom are the inseparable attributes of the great majesty of heaven, and run through every step of his administration, this should beget that joyful complacency in our lot which is the soul of contentment. Had we been banished from before the presence of God, and sent into this world as exiles, or, after creating man upon the face of the earth, had he left off to care for him, according to the comfortless hypotheses of certain among the ancients, what could have been more adviseable in such a forlorn state than for us to have fallen upon our knees before the Lord our Maker, and entreated him to restore us his countenance and protection? What might we rather have wished than that infinite wisdom and goodness should order all our concerns? And if our prayers are prevented, if our heavenly Father has not waited for our solicitations, what can be more unreasonable than for us to fret or be dissatisfied with the condition he hath appointed us?—The language of the discontented is, that things might have been better ordered, if they forsooth had been the counsellors of the Most High. They affect to be wiser than God, and depreciate his goodness. Have we not indulged the most earnest desires for things, that, if obtained, must have made

us miserable; and where we are satisfied, upon recollection, that disappointments have been real blessings? Have we not been as blind in our wishes, as Rachel was, who said, Gen. xxx. 1. Give me children, or I die; concerning whom, we know, that the obtaining her request cost her life. We would have more ease, more riches, more honour, more pleasure; but by the gratification might not more be added to our desires than to our enjoyments? Do not we see others possess of these things we covet, nay of more than our hearts crave, where yet there is little superadded to their present comfort, and the eternal salvation of their souls is endangered? Who knoweth what is good for a man in this life, all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow? And where all is involved in such darkness and uncertainty, are we displeased that God chooses for us? All the returns we can make to divine wisdom and goodness is by thanking God, and using what he has bestowed to his glory, and this is all he requires: And how base a part do we act, if, in place of rendering this tribute, we are peevish and dissatisfied; if, in place of acknowledging his favour, we lessen it, saying, like Buyers, It is naught, it is naught. The peevishness of a child who frets at his parent, because he chuses for him, and will not gratify him to his hurt, is a beautiful emblem of one who is discontent with what God

has given him. The image, however, is imperfect, and too faint. Children know nothing of the wisdom or deference that belong to years: They think as children, and therefore act as children. But here they that have in so far put away childish things as to know that the foolishness of God is wiser than man, they that think as men, behave like froward children. The fretfulness of a child is sometimes owing to the impatience and humour of a parent who corrects for his pleasure. But discontent with our heavenly Father is always unprovoked, for he chastens us only for our profit. Look then upon your lot, and remember who has designed it for you. That you desiderate something which gives uneasiness, is not owing to parsimony. He that has lavished upon you so many blessings, would never have withheld this, if he had not regarded your interest more than your importunity, and what you need more than what you wish. That there are here troubles and afflictions, is because they are medicinal and salutary. This cup, wisdom has mingled for you: receive it dutifully, as Jesus did an harsher cup, John xviii. 11. The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?

So much let it suffice to have said concerning divine providence in this place, where it is purposely and by itself considered. Many things deserving re-

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gard are here dropt, which may perhaps occur afterwards, as this will meet us in every part of our subject.

2. Another source from which arguments to contentment may be deduced, is the world; and in the state of it there are the following things abundantly obvious, which strongly enforce contentment.

(1.) In the world there are various ranks and classes of men, and of these the highest not seldom possessed by the wicked and undeserving.

We observe mankind widely discriminated by outward circumstances; and this subordination of high and low, rich and poor, is nearly coæval with the world itself. It is the foundation of all order, policy, and government, and an original part in the plan of that infinite wisdom which made all things very good. This, if duly attended to, may show that our dissatisfactions, in so far as they take their rise from the place or station assigned us, are groundless and unreasonable: He that formed the great and the small, that regardeth not the persons of princes, nor accepteth the rich more than the poor, may be entrusted with disposing of you. You are but one in this family of God; and the great head of it, in ordering your lot, must consult the good of the whole. Here, as in the courts of princes, indulgence to particular favourites might be of general detriment. You are not disturbed at seeing thou-
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sands about you in very humble spheres; and what are you more than they that makes you think the same condition so unfuitable to yourself? That place of higher profit or honour which you aspire after, is the object of ambition to numbers besides. What you wish, the same they wish and pray for; and how can wisdom itself contrive to gratify you all, or whose claim should be preferred? And as there are various degrees among men, so it is not less remarkable that they are the forward, the rash, the assuming, and daringly wicked, or the cunning and political, that often rise to the highest and most eminent. This too is but the course of the world; and as it cannot surprise, so it ought not to offend us. It was an old rabbinical observation, that the world was made for the presumptuous. If fraud, ambition, and the other indirect arts common in high and low life, in the palaces of kings, and in the labourer's cottage, were constantly to be frustrated by an extraordinary divine influence, and otherwise they cannot be always disappointed, then there would be no temptation to vice, no test to prove and distinguish virtue and true faith: the effect of this miracle would be a total subversion of the present order of things, which the querulous cannot expect. This which provokes, should methinks allay and cure our discontent. Are they to be envied their success in the world, when this is all they shall ever

reap from the sinister courses they pursue? Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. Would you participate in the wages of unrighteousness, which yet you have scrupled to earn? Or are you discouraged that others have outbid you in this market? Besides, these persons who have left you behind may be no less undeserving than you suppose, and yet not unfit for the stations to which they are exalted. By lawless tyrants and dishonest intriguing ministers in every nation, providence has its important purposes to serve, no less than by the best rulers. The chief places in Judæa were once filled by an abandoned corrupt administration. But who fitter than they for doing whatsoever his hand and his counsel had determined before to be done? By these instruments was accomplished the death of Jesus, the most illustrious event in the annals of time; an event fraught with blessings to all succeeding ages, which had a retrospect to the foundations of the world, and diffusive spread saving health over all nations. Asaph was offended at the prosperity of the wicked, as you read Psal. lxxiii. in which he has perhaps prevented the sentiments of your heart: But he is afterwards more offended at himself that he has found fault with the divine counsels; ver. 22. So foolish was I and ignorant; I was as a beast before thee. Psal. xvi. 10. Say among the heathen that
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the Lord reigneth; the world also shall be established that it shall not be moved.

(2.) It is further to be observed concerning the world, that it is a scene of woe and misery, and full of trouble, from which the most envied state in it gives no exemption.

It is not perhaps your lot in general, that your success in the world is below your desert, or that others with less merit have outstript you, and that the ungodly are they who prosper,—It is not this which gives uneasiness: But that in every state, even that which you courted with the greatest earnestness, you have met with unforeseen trouble. Attend, however, and you will find that this also is exactly according to the course of things in this world, where there is no sweet without its alloy; and that he who is disquieted upon this account, is never like to be less so than at present, as to his life's end he is sure always to have the same occasion. We are not invited hither to take a full repast; we are not now like our happy innocent first parents, when they were placed in Eden, the garden of God, surrounded with whatever could delight, and permitted to taste of every pleasant fruit. But we come, as it were, into another world, and upon different terms. This world is such as guilt has made it, producing briars and thorns; a wilderness; a valley of tears. Our life in it is a pilgrimage, a term of trial. Sacred

cred writ instructs us in plain terms that trouble is the inevitable state, the birthright of humanity. Job v. 7. Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward. The highest pinnacle of dignity to which we can here ascend, is so far from setting us above its reach, that even virtue and grace, these truly ennobling qualities which do indeed exalt the soul, often involve us in a greater share. Psal. xxxiv. 19. Many are the afflictions of the righteous. The Christian vocation is a call to suffer. 1 Pet. ii. 21. For even hereunto were ye called; because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that ye should follow his steps. And what the spirit of God reveals is confirmed by what we see and hear, by experience and observation, by history and tradition. We find in every state its miseries; or if we have thought any was exalted, we have only been deluded by our distance from it, and a fond admiration of what is above us. Human life is but a series of sorrows, and that without interruption from the first piteous wailings of infancy, to the expiring groans of age; in which every one partakes, from the king upon his throne, to her that sits behind the mill—Enquire, I pray thee, of the former age, and prepare thyself to the search of their fathers. Shall they not teach thee, and tell thee the same thing, and utter words out of their heart? It was not otherwise than now from the most ancient times.

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Read the history of foreign nations, and for their greater part they are to be accounted the registers of sorrow. Cast an eye upon the weekly journals and gazettes; and the accounts they publish are of death and devastation; cities sacked or swallowed up of the earth; countries depopulated; thousands massacred, and thousands made prisoners. The continent of Europe has often been an acclama, a field of blood; and in more distant quarters of the earth, there are the habitations of darkness and cruelty. Can any thing then appear more unreasonable than for men to be discontented, that they meet with their troubles in such a region as this? Would they pass through this state of trial without their trials? Would they accomplish this journey of life without ought to obstruct or make them uneasy? Would they finish this voyage without an unprosperous gale? Are they displeased that they have not a lot that none besides ever had? They are seeking what is fugitive and chimerical. The world says, It is not in me. To you may be applied the words of Jeremiah, xlv. 5. unto Baruch, when his anxious disciple bemoaned himself, saying, Wo is me now, for the Lord hath added grief to my sorrow, I fainted in my sighing, and I find no rest. The reproof of the prophet was to this purpose, And seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not: for behold I will bring evil upon all flesh, saith the Lord.

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(3.) Not only is the best state in this world exposed to trouble, but the best things in it are insufficient to make us happy.

That the good things of life, as they are called, are not pure and unmixed, and yield not the high enjoyment expected from them, is one fruitful source of discontent. Many who can endure the troubles of their lot with decency, are chagrined to meet with disappointments here, and are ready to say, if he had been an enemy, I could have borne it. But our uneasiness of this sort, however great, is of our own procuring. We have taken our estimates too high; it may be from vulgar error. In fixing a value upon these things, we have submitted to the gross impositions of opinion and credulous fancy. The best mean for remedying this sore evil, so common and baneful amongst the children of men, is a careful attention to the true nature of the good things of this world, from which it will appear that they are insufficient to our happiness, and necessarily productive of trouble. These things, from the very moment they become mine, cease to be the property of my brother. I cannot gain them but at the expence of some other, perhaps more deserving. Riches to me is poverty to another. My abundance is want to many whom a division might relieve; and my success involves disappointment to numbers. Such are marks of vanity,
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which they carry, as it were, upon the outside: which strike upon the first sight, and discover an emptiness and deficiency, before there is time for penetrating deeper.

But this, upon acquaintance, becomes more palpable; and a few experiments more effectually than any thing, convince us that these things are not in themselves what men generally esteem them, or our own fancy represented them to be. On our arrival at wealth or dignity, especially if this has been unexpected, they have a certain relish, which, if they lose not altogether, yet is infinitely diminished, only by becoming familiar, so that by the time we thought we should have tasted all their sweets, we come to be satisfied that they have extremely few. At first it pleases us not a little to know that we are in circumstances which those about us count happy and prosperous. But we must quickly lose what is enjoyed so much at second hand, and the opinion of others will contribute little to our felicity, how soon we have found it to be groundless and false. All sublunary good things fall infinitely beneath our expectations, and where much is looked for, there is usually little reapt. If providence should put it in our power to repeat all the experiments which Solomon tells us he made in former times; they would lead to the same conclusion which he drew, Ecc. i. 2. *Vanity of vanities, vanity of vanities, all is vanity.*—

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Besides

Beside his series of disappointments, there are positive evils from which the good things of this world cannot be separated. Every sweet has its temper ture of bitter; every rose has its thorn. We would be rich; but as riches increase, vanity increases with them; our cares, our sollicitudes, our fears, and not uncommonly our desires likewise are increased. We would be promoted to a more conspicuous and honourable station; by preferment we are marked out for envy and detraction, and what is worse, we are set on slippery places. We ask long life, and length of days is granted; but what avails this? We witness the same circle of vanity oftener revolve, we survive our kindred; we see our children laid before us in the dust; we perhaps outlive ourselves, and, having neither friend nor brother, can only serve mankind by teaching another generation, that the strength of old age is labour and sorrow. Nay, as the good things of life are multiplied, the evils, at the same time, proportionably grow. When our possessions are great, our losses, it is likely, will become considerable. When our interests are extended, in the ordinary course of things we must lay our account with more crosses and disappointments; we are then the broader mark for trouble. And which crowns all, we are more quickly and sensibly affected with events that are unfavourable, than with others that are prosperous,

rous. Whether this is owing to the disorder of our minds in this state, there is no need to enquire, since all must own that it is, as we have said. The man in the parable went in search of one sheep that had strayed, leaving the ninety nine in the wilderness; the safety of the flock could not make him easy, while but one was amissing. If one child is carried off by death, what does the mourning parent feel; perhaps none but he can tell: that numbers survive, can hardly comfort him, till time has mollified the wounded heart. The vicious courses of one prodigal son shall give more anguish, than it may be the virtue of a pious family will repay.

Such sober reflections concerning the present state of things, duly pondered, may be of use to moderate our expectations, and serve to place before us in a striking light, the folly and unreasonableness of all discontent. We live in a world where we see a promiscuous distribution does and must take place; in which the most prosperous lot is not without trouble, and even the best things are mixt with evil. If we can make any hard shift to pass our few days here with tolerable ease, it is well with us. It is unreasonable to be always fretting, that things are not to our wish, that we cannot gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles. To be dissatisfied with these things which are the very conditions of our present lot, is in truth to complain that God has

made us men ; that we are not in paradise ; and that we are not angels. These obvious remarks being suggested, may I not say to the discontented in the words of Job, xxvii. 12. Behold, all ye yourselves have seen it ; why then are ye thus altogether vain ? Or of the prophet Jeremiah, iv. 14. How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee.

PART SECOND.

HAVING considered the all-ruling providence of God, and from this descended to the world or the present state of things as they are here administered by him, Let us now come home, and,

3. Attend to our own condition, the particular allotment which has fallen to the part of each of us.

This also, though it is universally blamed as the cause of our disquietude, will be found to furnish powerful arguments to contentment. There is one thing obvious, that those who are uppermost in the world, who dwell at ease, strangers to real want, and little acquainted with hardships of any kind, are yet liable to uneasinesses and disgusts almost as uninterrupted as their good fortune ; while beneath, among the poor and indigent, to whom the crumbs of their table would be affluence, there are some to be found uniformly chearful and well pleased. In

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the best and most prosperous outward circumstances men are dissatisfied and miserable; and in the very worst they are actually happy. This amounts to a full and undeniable proof, that discontent does not proceed, as men through mistake suppose, from the condition here, or any thing external. But we shall not rest in this general remark. The conclusion will appear more evident by descending to particulars, and pondering things more minutely. Let our present condition, then, be turned upon every side; let it be considered as it is in itself; let it be compared with that of others; let it be compared with what we deserve at the hand of God. By viewing it in all these different lights, we shall be capable to judge rationally concerning it; and will see good reason, not only to desist from foolish complaint, but to take up the song of praise to him who hath appointed for every one his lot.

(1.) Let our present condition be impartially considered as it is in itself; and the good things in it will be found infinitely to preponderate the evils we complain of.

Here, in place of endeavouring any enumeration of the divine blessings bestowed by him who is rich in mercy, were it not better for me to sit down after beseeching you to enter each into his state, and leave you to gather these together in secret recollection. At best I can only attempt assisting you by
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very generalh ints. Various as our conditions are, there is this capital article which must stand at the head of the account, and that is life. There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding. From God we derive the very breath with which we complain gainst him. This is the source and foundation of all other blessings. To the righteous, it is the time for laying up treasure in heaven; to the wicked, it is the only season of repentance. To all, eternity depends upon it. But without regard to consequences, it endears itself to every one; there is nothing so sweet; nature's first law is the preservation of it; all that a man has will he give for his life. Here should fall to be considered the human constitution and frame, fearfully and wonderfully made, exquisitely contrived for happiness; its many curious inlets for present pleasure; its vast capacities for future endless enjoyment; and neither the one nor the other unprovided for. Is there not reason to say with the prophet Jeremiah, Lam. iii. 39. Wherefore doth a living man complain?

Next in the account of every one, stands preservation; a general and comprehensive article. This is the continuation of the former, the repeating of that radical donation, and bestowing life upon us every moment. In him we live, and move, and have our being. We came naked out of our mother's womb,

womb, and brought nothing hither with us, that his power and munificence in supporting us might be the more evident. He bestows the food we eat, the raiment we put on, and gives his beloved rest; daily recruits and favours, which we would not undervalue, did we only suffer ourselves to advert to what is obvious, that the want of these common mercies would quickly effect the dissolution of our mortal frame, and that the shortest interruption of them is insufferable. Sum up the blessings of one day, one page in this book of life; how many are they, and what will the total be! How frequent have been the signal interpositions of providence in your behalf, and what the extraordinary largesses of his bounty! You may be challenged properly, in the words of God to Abraham, speaking to the patriarch of his seed, Gen. xv. 5. Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them. So are the blessings which God has bestowed.

Here it may possibly be objected, that what is now said cannot affect some part of mankind, and there are many who, upon the account of hard circumstances, do not lie under the same obligations with others to divine providence. But who are they now present who may be thought to object with the greatest reason? With such let me expostulate seriously. Are there any here who earn every morsel with the sweat of their brows, and are unfurnished
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for the smallest interruption of sickness? Are there any here, whose hardest labour is insufficient to procure necessary subsistence for themselves and family? Are there any here altogether laid aside from work by incidental distress or the impairs of age? Are there any here who have no resource beside the frozen charity of others, who must ask the cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, and for Christ's sake beg an alms?—If there is a state that may be called bad, your's is such. But after all is taken in, that can aggravate your circumstances, how great are your obligations, and what ground have you to confide in providence! You still enjoy life, which, with all the disadvantages attending it, you prize no less than others do. You share in many good things which the rich cannot monopolize. Have you not from time to time received, often unexpectedly, the necessary supply, so that to you it has come as it were directly from the hand of God? You have never been left utterly destitute: you have been perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed. Though you have nothing laid by you in store, yet you have the same reason to expect that you will be provided for next day, and next year, as your rich neighbour has to expect that he shall live another day or year to enjoy what he now possesses. *Matt. vi. 25, &c.* Is not the life more than meat, and the
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body than raiment? The morrow shall take thought for the things of itself: Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. It is then from an unreasonable distrust, and not at all from your own lot, however hard, that your impatience proceeds. And if this is the case of the most indigent, what shall be said of the discontent of others who are above necessity? Of those who seem to be altogether out of its reach; of those who are placed in the safe and happy mean, and have obtained what pious Agur prayed for, neither riches nor poverty; and especially of those in the other extreme, who are never wearied but with enjoyments, who are uneasy only because they know not what could make them happier, who have not where to bestow their goods. The discontent of such is worst to cure, and at the same time most unreasonable. The song of praise is better adapted to their circumstances. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.

After mentioning the obligations we ly under to God for life and preservation, there come to be stated our spiritual mercies and receivings, those blessings of all others the greatest and most permanent. Unto us, God, having raised up Jesus, sent him to bless us in turning us away every one from his iniquities. Blessed be God for his unspeakable gift. We enjoy his religion, pure and reformed from error, the very faith once delivered to the saints: We

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possess, as it were, by entail, all the privileges that can belong to any Christian church: Unto us are committed the oracles of truth, these treasures of sacred wisdom, the fountains of living water. The invisible hosts of angels are sent forth as ministering spirits to attend upon us, and watch for our safety. The Spirit of the Most High is given as our comfort-er, and guide, and intercessor. He deigns to reside in our hearts, and by this inhabitation, God in very deed dwells with men. The kingdom of heaven is prepared for our everlasting abode, an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away. It belongs not to the present subject to enquire how far the dispensations of grace are limited by the secret discriminating counsels of heaven. They who are excluded from participating, are, as appears from the characters they bear in scripture, self-excluded and unprepared; such as put away the kingdom from them, and count themselves unworthy of eternal life. Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters. The gospel is the power of God, and the wisdom of God, unto the Jew first, and also to the Greek. These that seem to be almost neglected in the distributions of providence, have here a portion as of sons and daughters; the poor of this world are rich in faith, and heirs of the promises. How precious are thy thoughts unto us, O God, how great is the sum of them!

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After this view of the blessings in our present condition, where the argument has unawares led me beyond the bounds proposed, where are the evils to be placed over against them? Beware of adducing here the evils that owe their very existence to your own fancy. Are these his doings? Is this the spirit of the Lord, O house of Jacob? It is because he visits us not with severities, that these are so sensibly felt; they lessen not our obligations to God; and though they occasion by far the greater part of our discontent, they can never justify it. These, as they ought, struck out of the account, how few will there be found remaining that have any reality! Let the substantial evils in the most uncomfortable lot be duly considered; let them be numbered; let them be weighed, and their duration measured; it must be owned, they are not to be compared with the eternal and exceeding weight of glory to be revealed, or even with the temporal benefits on the other side. How vast in every respect is the disproportion! And is it wise to pore only upon what is displeasing, or to remember only what is unfavourable, when there is so much matter at hand for pleasing reflection? The expectation of future happiness carried the forefathers of our faith bravely through the hardest trials, through fiery trials: And will we not think all present and future, a balance for the inconsiderable difficulties of our condition? Shall not

such infinite beneficence reconcile us to every step of providence, and lively sentiments of gratitude make every bitter thing sweet? Job ii. 10. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil also?

(2.) Let our condition be compared with that of others.

If our condition is upon the whole good, the blessings of it preponderating the evils, we ought to be thankful for it: or if we are as favourably dealt with, as those about us, there can be no reason for complaints. The comparisons of this kind, which we are often accustomed to make, generally indeed prove a fruitful source of discontent. But, without the aid of magic, the poison may be converted into an antidote; and all the bad consequences of such comparisons may be imputed to the following errors. Men undervalue blessings for no other reason but because they are their own, and prize highly what others possess. Certain things we have set our hearts upon, and unweariedly pursued, which we have no sooner reached, than we despised them: or it may be, like the incestuous Amnon, hated more than we loved before. A wretched prejudice which blasts every enjoyment, and while it prevails, the whole world, if we had got it, could never make us happy.—Again, men compare themselves only with those above them, seldom attending to others on the

the level with themselves, and still more rarely descending to the numbers in inferior classes, situated beneath them.—Further, men, in estimating the felicity of those above them, take it for granted that the reality is altogether according to appearances, and allow no deduction upon account of the latent sorrows that attend upon the most exalted estate. In fine, after accumulating all that is favourable in the lot of others, they no less carefully select the hardships of their own, and put these only into the opposite scale; the very reverse of what is ordinarily practised in estimating characters, where we single out no less industriously our own good qualities, and of our neighbour regard only his failings and vices. Is it any wonder if such fallacious comparisons have a bad effect, and that we are out of humour with our own condition, when we have done all that is possible to misrepresent it to ourselves, and have brought it out in so deceitful a light, as if we had plotted our own misery? But let us avoid these errors which are detected by mentioning them; the result in that case will be more comfortable; we will be forced to own that our lot, though not in all respects so prosperous as we have wished, is yet equal to that of multitudes besides, and such as leaves no just ground for envy and repining.

According to any idea we can form from history or observation, the cares, anxieties, and disquietudes
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of various kinds inseparable from the most exalted stations in life, are such as the advantages of power and honours never can compensate. A wise man would prefer a quiet and safe obscurity to the dignity of a throne; and if called to reign as unexpectedly as Saul the son of Kish was, like him he would decline the arduous task and hide himself. But we need not insist here. Boundless as our ambition is, we are never so extravagant as to vex ourselves that we are not princes. Such objects are at too great a distance to have any attractive influence. Those that tempt us are ordinarily the stations nearer, and more immediately above us. But even here, if we would forbear to impose upon ourselves, if we would strip things of a false lustre, for which they are indebted to our imagination, and judge of them coolly, we would acknowledge there was ground to rest patient in our desires, if not to be altogether indifferent. Your opinions, perhaps, concerning these are so fixed and habitual, that they cannot be corrected; and all I can say to make you better acquainted with the real condition of those you envy, will fail of success, as much as arguments to persuade you of the motion of the earth, which you have always thought to be strictly, as it is apparently, settled and immovable. But if you will look up to them above with admiration, will you not cast your eyes around upon those

those who are upon the level, and look down to those that are far beneath you? This general view may be of use to reconcile you to your own lot. Ponder what you have read concerning the patriarchs, the prophets, the apostles, of whom the world was not worthy; and concerning the sufferings of Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, who was indeed a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. And will not a comparison of your own condition with those, make you for ever ashamed of discontent, Heb. xii. 1—3. But not to go back, do not the present times furnish instructive scenes of sorrow? Shall I mention galleys and mines, inquisitions, and dreary prisons, fields of battle, and hospitals of sick? There are our fellow creatures in a miserable plight; there are objects of real distress; and what is all that we complain of? But if we do not like to dwell upon what is so shocking, or think it unfair to argue from the pitiable state of so small a part of mankind, let us, if you will, take the greater part of our brethren; and upon a strict serious enquiry, none of us will venture to say, There is no sorrow, like to my sorrow. We read that Solon led his friend, oppressed with grief, to an eminence near to Athens, and bade him look down upon that flourishing city, and consider how many miserable persons inhabited under these roofs. There are few persons to be found
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together at any time, or in any place, where there are not some, like Hannah, of a sorrowful spirit. It is recorded of an ancient king, who immoderately lamented the death of his queen, that there came to him a philosopher, who offered, upon a certain condition, to restore his beloved princess to life again. But what was the condition? that he should inscribe upon her tombstone the name of two persons that had never wept: and we should blush to repine, when upon the same condition all our evils may be remedied. We have met with loss; but we shall find others destitute, and so far reduced that they have nothing to lose: We are in pain; others are in torment: We want many things we could wish to have; others are in extreme penury, having nothing: We are in grief; others are to be found in anguish and despair. If all the evils scattered through the world were gathered together, would we not rather depart with our own, than venture an exchange by drawing from this common stock? and is it not most indecent for us to be dissatisfied?—Trouble is a general tax upon the human kind. Every one bears a share; and why would we shift off our proportion of the assessment? Art thou greater than our father Abraham? Whom makest thou thyself? Art thou greater than Jesus? Is it not enough for the disciple that he be as his Master? This argument is used by the apostle Peter, iv. 12. to recon-

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cile Christians to the most cruel death: Brethren, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: and should not we be reconciled to ordinary trials, when there hath no temptation taken us, but such as is common to man?

(3.) Let our condition be compared with our desert before God.

Our condition is in itself good, the blessings of it greatly exceeding the evils, and compared with that of others, is such as we would not venture rashly to exchange: and will not discontent appear to be highly unreasonable, if, besides all this, it is greatly beyond what we deserve, or could expect at the hand of God? This will be found truly the case upon the least reflection. If our lot is not calamitous beyond example, we have no reason to murmur; and though it is ever so wretched and destitute, we have no title to repine. We may say with Mephibosheth, 2 Sam. xix. 28. What right have I to cry any more to the king? David had disposed half his estate to Ziba, a treacherous servant; and he might with justice have objected that the grant was rash, and obtained by gross misrepresentation; but the loyal good hearted man made no remonstrance: as if the injuries done by his father had been his own, though he did not so much as approve them; what right have I to cry any more to the king? We may adopt his words,

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and with infinitely better reason. Let me bespeak attention in the words of Elihu, Job xxxvi. 2. Suffer me a little, and I will shew thee that I have yet to speak on God's behalf. What did we to merit life, before we received our being; or to deserve that paternal benignity and care which led through the helpless improvident years of infancy and childhood? What have we done to acquire a title unto later favours, or even to discharge that original debt? Who hath given unto God, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? Shall our religious services be mentioned? These are too imperfect to found any claim: it is well, all things considered, that our blood has never been mingled with our sacrifices. Shall we state our illiberal niggardly charities, or our other good works? These all are defective, wanting merit to recommend themselves to the divine favour and acceptance. Our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. If the blessings of heaven had been interrupted as often as our duties have been omitted, and God had bestowed no more freely than we have offered, or if with what measure we mete, it had been measured unto us, would not our circumstances now have been much more deplorable than they are? Some such confession it becomes us to make as that of holy Jacob: the goodness and desert of that illustrious man is computed as nothing, and he does not depreciate the blessings in his lot, though

though at this time brought into the utmost distress and perplexity, Gen. xxxii. 10. I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth which thou hast shewn unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands.—And as the blessings of God are beyond our desert, so no less, as it must be owned, does our guilt and demerit exceed the measure of evil which occasions all our discontent. Our iniquities are as the hairs of our head, or the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered; our troubles few: We sin every day, and are only now and then visited with distress: We transgress with greediness and obstinacy; whereas he afflicts not willingly, nor grieves any of the children of men. Such is the disproportion betwixt our sins and our afflictions, that we might almost be tempted to doubt whether the one was indeed the procuring cause of the other.—We complain that many things are wanting, and bemoan ourselves as in the spirit of the prophet Isa. xxiv. 16. My leanness, my leanness; wo unto me. But if God should withhold every good thing we have forfeited by sin, what would now remain of all that we possess? Were he only to deprive us of the means and power of repeating our offences, even this were vengeance insupportable. If the Almighty should awake to judgment, and inflict according to desert, strictly marking our iniquities, where then

should the wicked and ungodly appear? Would not our whips be turned into scorpions? How arrogant and provoking must our complaints be, as if we were not the debtors to justice, but God were our debtor? Who art thou, O man, that repliest against God? Is not the hardest lot better than you deserve? Is not the worst state here better than a portion in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone? Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and long-suffering, and forbearance? When Joseph's unnatural brethren were imprisoned in Egypt, and roughly entreated, the remembrance of their guilt in these circumstances silenced them, Gen. xlii. 21. And they said one to another, we are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us; and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us.—The thief upon the cross acquitted the providence of God, saying, Luke xxiii. 41. We suffer justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds. The saints and good men in scripture, in place of repining at their hard lot, have wondered that it was not worse, and from their penitent devout acknowledgements, you find it was the remembrance of guilt that reconciled them to suffering, Ezra ix. 13. Job xl. 4. Pl. ciii. 8. Lam. iii. 22, 39. Mic. vii. 9.

4. Having

4. Having dwelt so long upon our condition in the world, and viewed it in every light, Let us now more particularly fix our eye upon the evils of it, which immediately occasion our complaints; and it will be found that even this dark side of life is not altogether so dismal as we might suppose. This saddening prospect may indeed make us serious and pensive, but cannot justify a disconsolate strain, like that of the prophet Isaiah, xxii. 4. Turn away from me, I will weep bitterly; labour not to comfort me. What naturalists have observed concerning the world, that for whatever is noxious and hurtful in any country, there is produced the proper antidote and counterpoison, will apply to the lot of man, its principal inhabitant. There is here provided an antidote for every evil, something to compensate or alleviate and lessen it. And the general temperature and mixture is such, that the good upon the whole does far overbalance the evil. Good is set over against evil; so that man finds nothing after God to complain of, or amend. But passing from these observations, which have in part been touched at already, we are now to take the afflictions of life singly and by themselves; and even these, if seriously considered, will suggest reflections which may at least convince us that our discontents are groundless and unreasonable.

(1.) The evils of this life, even if they could be supposed unmixt, are of a short and uncertain duration;

tion; and these that now afflict us will soon be at an end.

Supposing now that innumerable evils have compassed us about, evils in reality as great as we are ready to fancy them, and that after looking around on every side, there appears no way of escaping from them. Yet what is the ordinary course of things? Is there any necessary connection betwixt the present and the future? are we sure that to-morrow will be as this day? or do not the wonderful and unexpected revolutions, which we daily see, give us reason to presume the contrary? God poureth contempt upon princes, and weakeneth the strength of the mighty: he raiseth the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill: he casteth down the mighty from their seat, and exalteth the humble and meek: he sendeth the rich empty away, and filleth the hungry with good things. And may not we look out for the happy reverse of our fortune, and humbly expect that he will make us hear joy and gladness, that the bones which he hath broken may rejoice. The same consideration adduced by the wise Solomon to prevent the arrogance and boasting incident to men who have a full cup and are at ease in their possessions, is equally suitable to the most destitute and afflicted, and may help such to the exercise of contentment. Prov. xxvii. 1. Boast not thyself of to morrow for
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thou knowest not what a day may bring forth. A good man bearing his yoke with patience and struggling with adversity, is not only the object of complacency to the Almighty, but of his compassion and sympathy; as scripture declares in very emphatic terms. His bowels found: his heart is troubled within him: in all their afflictions he is afflicted: like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. And is there not reason to think that relief will ensue, and that he who now eyes us with pity will sometime interpose to deliver. To the afflicted there are many precious promises made which confirm our reasonings, and give us strong consolation. Ps. xxxiv. 17, 18, 20. 1 Cor. x. 13. The rich and prosperous are wont to reckon upon it, that their mountain stands fast, and they shall never be moved; but they have not such reasons for expecting that their stores will be preserved, as the poor have to hope that his wants will be supplied, or the mourner that his sorrow will be turned into joy.

What edifying instances may be observed in the world, and occur in history to illustrate the present argument! Into what deep distress was Abraham brought by that trying command in relation to Isaac! The divine will was intimated: the difficult act of obedience was resolved: He considered Isaac as dead. Rachel's heart, when she mourned for
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her children, and would not be comforted because they were not, was not sadder or heavier than his, when he travelled to Moriah. But how unexpectedly his hand was staid: his purposes accepted and prevented: His darling redeemed from death; and he returned rejoicing.—Was any person ever in a more hopeless state than Joseph, when cast into a dreary pit by his spiteful brethren; or afterwards into the ghastly prison by his lewd mistress; accused of attempting the basest crime, for no other reason but because he honestly detested it. But in the account of the life of this good man, which sets before us such variety of fortune as perhaps cannot be paralleled in any history, the deliverance came so quickly that it might almost be said to overtake the calamity; and it is doubtful whether the one or the other was most unexpected.

Behold Job that upright man, reduced to want; deprived in one day of all his substance, and all his children; sitting on a dunghill, scraping himself with a potsherd; and, if any thing could aggravate such circumstances, unpitied and insulted by the friends of prosperity. But in this abyss of misery he did not long remain. You have heard of the end of the Lord. He gave to Job twice as much as he had before. In what pitiable circumstances was pious David for sometime, hunted as a partridge on the mountains. I am weary with crying, my throat is
dried

dried, mine eyes fail: but he was after this seated on the throne, his former misfortunes only preparing him for relishing the distinguished tranquillity with which he was blessed. Great deliverance giveth he to his king, and sheweth mercy to his anointed, to David and to his seed for evermore. In such examples we see the divine compassion to advantage by its effects; and the faithful accomplishment of his promises strongly encourages hope. Is there nothing for us in the womb of the same benign providence? None of them that trust in him shall be desolate. Weeping may endure for a night; but joy cometh in the morning.

Or if the gracious ends of divine wisdom require that here we have our evil things without interruption; if all our days are to be passed away in his wrath; if, to use the expression of Solomon, Eccl. ii. 23. All our days are sorrows, yet even this will quickly have a period. It ought to reconcile us to this irksome lot, that, as they are evil, they are at the same time few; and we can join with good Jacob in that brief memoir of his life, which yet was longer by one half than any of us shall ever see. Gen. xlvii. 9. Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been. The moving expressions used in scripture to describe the brevity of human life, will all apply to its sorrows. They flee like a shadow, and continue not: They are winds passing, and coming

not again : They are vapours appearing for a little time, and then vanishing away : They are as grass, and fade as a leaf : They are swifter than a post : They are but an hand-breadth, and as nothing. Our Saviour's words, in which he dissuaded his disciples from the cowardly fear of man, may here be used, Luke xii. 4. And I say unto you, my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. In your last moments, with the departing breath, when you bid an adieu to your friends, you may bid defiance to them. That awful term will come, when you shall lose sight of them all, and it may be said to you of all your persecutors, as Moses said to the Israelites concerning the Egyptians on the brink of the Red Sea, These Egyptians whom ye have seen to-day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. This is an argument from which Job learned his exemplary patience, as uncommon as his sufferings ; and he is careful never to lose sight of it ; Job xiv. 14. All the days of my appointed time will I wait till my change come. xvii. 13. If I wait, the grave is mine house ; I have made my bed in the darkness. Ch. iii. 17, 18, 19. There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary be at rest : There the prisoners rest together ; they hear not the voice of the oppressor ; the small and the great are there ; and the servant is free from his master.—Are, then, the miseries of this
life

life of so short duration, as appears from a calm dispassionate view of them, and that certain term where they shall end so very near? And can we justify to ourselves these discontents so universally indulged? Must we not rather censure and condemn them in the words of the Psalmist, xxxix. 5, 6. Behold thou hast made my days as an hand-breadth, and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity. Surely every man walketh in a vain shew: surely they are disquieted in vain.

(2.) As the evils of this life are of short duration, so, while they continue, they are productive of much good and benefit unto the soul afflicted by them.

I mean not to affirm that in every case alike they are actually attended with equal advantage. The same fire which softens the wax is observed to harden the clay; and to some of stubborn hearts, like Judah and Jerusalem, when they are stricken, will revolt more and more. But with regard to the greater part, those things which are not sweet in the mouth, nor pleasant to the taste, prove in fact the means of much good. Heb. xii. 9—12. We have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence. Shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after

their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees. The advantages of affliction are so great, that they prove it not only useful but necessary, and so many that they cannot be enumerated. There is something in easy affluent circumstances that soothes the mind into a habit of listlessness, and in its waking intervals carries it away after a thousand vanities. But distress, more effectually than any thing else, brings a man to himself. It rouses him from sleep, and interrupts the airy dreams of prosperity. It obliges him to deliberate with composure, and turn his thoughts every way. It in a manner forces him to recollect what he has been, to consider what he is, and to look forward to eternity.

Prosperity often renders wicked men secure in their evil courses; because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God. They either fancy that the Almighty does not see, or they misinterpret the benignity of his providence, so as to conclude that he is not displeased with them, and thus the opportunities and temptations to vice, with which they are perpetually surrounded, prove to them insuperable.

superable. Distress is usually the first thing that awakens conviction, and leads such persons to serious repentance. Hof. v. 15. I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early. The next verse contains the resolution of Ephraim and Judah. Ch. vi. 1. Come and let us return unto the Lord; for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. This has been the case of many others. Joseph's unnatural brethren never felt any compunction, till affliction, bearing the marks of their crime, as face answers unto face, brought it to remembrance. Gen. xlii. 21. We are verily guilty concerning our brother. I need not repeat what we read to the same purpose concerning Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Manasseh, David, or the prodigal son in the parable. It is enough to say in general, that you do not find in scripture any remarkable conversion accomplished, except by this mean.

Uninterrupted prosperity is usually seen to puff up the mind with haughtiness and pride, and to beget a lordly contempt of those beneath us. Affliction is in this case the best remedy: it is the proper corrosive for eating out that humour of the heart: it shows us our own frailty, and the instability of human things: it brings down the high look, and, beyond any other thing, teaches us to esteem others bet-

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ter than ourselves, and to think soberly and as we ought to think.

Prosperity, as it renders us inattentive to our most important concerns, so it too often makes us insensible of the miseries of others. Little think they who are accustomed to ease and affluence, of the condition of many that wear out their days in penury and want, or are dying of a broken heart. This cannot be better represented than in the words of the prophet Amos, vi. 4—6. They that lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall, that chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of music, that drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments. They are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph. But adversity melts down and softens the heart; it makes us more susceptible of humane and tender impressions; forming us to bear one another's burdens, to mourn with them that mourn, and weep with them that weep. How necessary this is to teach us sympathy, and quicken our compassion, may be learnt, as from innumerable inferior examples, so more especially from the history of our Saviour. It was from what he suffered, from his intimate acquaintance with grief, that the blessed Jesus learnt that feeling to which we stand so infinitely indebted. Heb. ii. 17, 18. Wherefore

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In all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people: for in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.

Prosperity cements our hearts to the present world. When our appetites are gratified, our humours pleased, and every thing succeeds to our wish, we become insensibly so attached to it, that we cannot lift our souls to God, or think of a better state. We are for building tabernacles, and taking up our abode. But affliction turns to us its unpleasant side, and shows us its forbidding aspect: deprived of friends or substance, our interest in it is less; or of health, our relish for its best enjoyments is at an end. In distress, we are left with little else that can please us besides the exercise of trust in God, who is our refuge in trouble, our shelter from the tempest, and the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. It is adversity that puts us in mind of dissolution, and reconciles us to the thoughts of it. In the evil day wherein our soul has no pleasure, we come to say, I would not live always, nay to desire, with submission to the divine will, to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better.

Prosperity is often found to foster irreligion, and induces an habitual neglect of devotion. It is amazing,

zing, but true, that men in the fulness of health and plenty, when every thing smiles around, are ready to forget that Divine Being, the source of all these blessings; like the summer grove in its glory, and clad with leaves, which then shuts out the beams of the sun to which it owes its gaiety and rich verdure. Pious Agur apprehended danger of this kind, and therefore when he prayed against poverty, with the same breath requested his Maker that he would not send him riches. Prov. xxx. 9. Lest I be full and deny thee, and say who is the Lord?—But adversity, by removing outward props, casts us upon God, and brings us on our knees. When any signal calamity has overtaken us, when we have been oppressed by the rod of the wicked, when we have witnessed the departure of a dear friend, or death has stared us in the face, could we help in these or the like circumstances flying to God who is a present help in the time of need? affliction is wont to extort a prayer from good and bad. Job fell upon his face, and worshipped; and the mourners in the tempest cried every man unto his God. Were our prayers ever so frequent or fervent as when the hand of God was upon us? and of these who are now steadfast and unmoveable in the work of the Lord, and habitually devout, are there not many who can date from some distress the pious tendency of their soul?

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In prosperity there is no opportunity of proving many of the cardinal graces of the Christian life, such as faith, honesty, patience, and resignation to the divine will. These, if we possess them, must lie dormant, and useless, and languish in a state of inaction. We must remain in some measure unacquainted at home, and entertain reasonable doubts concerning our integrity. But adversity is the great and infallible test of sincerity. By this we are tried, as gold is tried in the fire; hence afflictions are called trials. In distress, God shews us to the world, and lets us see ourselves. The virtues then called into exercise, are strengthened and ripened into habits; they resemble the plants which wither under the beating of the sun, but thrive and prosper in the shade.

Prosperity begets an unhappy delicacy, highly detrimental to us in this unconstant climate, so that the slightest cross incident ruffles, and any great calamity altogether unhinges the soul. But adversity corroborates the constitution of the mind. By this discipline, we are trained-up for bearing trials, or facing opposition, and learn to endure hardness, like good soldiers of Jesus, the captain of our salvation, who was made perfect through sufferings.

But I am unwarily enticed too far into a subject, which is inexhaustible. A very little attention to the hints offered, will satisfy every one who thinks calmly, that even the afflictions of this short life are

salutary and beneficial; and experience, I doubt not, will suggest other reflections to the same purpose. We read of Zeno, a man devoted to the world in the days of his prosperity, when his whole estate, which had been laid out in merchandize, perished in a storm, that upon this unprosperous reverse, he betook himself to the study of wisdom, and, as the historian observes, he was saved by this shipwreck, and enriched by his misfortune. Said David, Psal. cxix. 71. It is good for me that I have been afflicted: that I might learn thy statutes. We read of Jesus, Heb. v. 8. That he learned obedience by the things which he suffered. Why then should we be disquieted upon the account of these afflictions, which we must acknowledge to be good and necessary for us? Why should we repine that this most effectual method is taken to cure us of folly, and instruct us in virtue? Is there not rather reason to thank God that, in dealing with us, he has consulted not with flesh and blood what might be pleasing to them, but what might correct and improve the soul, the better part. I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that in faithfulness thou hast afflicted me, Ps. cxix. 75.

(3.) In fine, as the evils of this life are productive of present benefit, so where they are well improved, they will be followed by future and endless bliss.

When

When the present state is considered in itself, and unconnected with what is to ensue, the evils of it, whatever be their immediate effect upon the soul, must wear a very gloomy aspect. If in this life only we have hope, suffering must make us miserable. But when the other world comes in view, and this is seen only as a short passage thither, the afflictions we meet with will have another appearance. These very afflictions which fall to the lot of the best men here, lead us to expect, in general, that there will be a time of retribution, when we shall return and discern between the righteous and the wicked. So far reason, deducing a plain inference from this mixt state of things, has led every thinking sober mind; and where this guide leaves us, revelation takes us up, bringing to light a resurrection, and assuring us that verily there is a reward for the righteous, and that their felicity will be infinite and eternal. The expectation of this is the only sure basis of contentment. The floods may dash, and the tempest beat upon it; but here the house will stand, because it is founded on a rock. What mean our modern free-thinkers by their unworthy labours to shake and undermine it? To rid us of the fears of punishment, they have struck out of their ingenious system the hopes of reward: in weeding out the tares, they have pulled up the wheat. They have endeavoured to take away what has wrought upon our most pow-

erful principles, and has been most effectual to prompt to duty, and support under woe, without being able to substitute any thing in its place. If they will have the honour they claim of setting men right, it is in the road to vice and misery. They have taken away our hopes, and what have we more?

Not only do the afflictions of life lead to the expectation of a better world, the reality and eternity of which, supernatural revelation ascertains; but they, in some measure, clear our title to it. Without an interest in the purchased possession, the bare discovery of it might amuse, but could not satisfy; our circumstances would resemble those of the Israelites, who saw the promised land, but yet were to die in the wilderness. To many, indeed, all the troubles of a hard lot are but the beginning of sorrows: woe to such; it had been better for them that they had never been born. But the sanctified afflictions of good men that work improvement now, give good reason to expect felicity hereafter. By perfecting our character, they confirm our hopes: they are marks of Jesus, and badges of adoption, concerning which scripture says, Heb. xii. 5—8. My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him. For whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you, as with sons: for what son

is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Nay further, the afflictions of this life, where we are suitably exercised under them, will add to our future happiness. In the same proportion as they ripen us in grace and virtue here, they will hereafter advance us in glory. When God renders to every man according to his deeds, and recompenses tribulation to the oppressors of this earth, he will recompense our troubles and labours of love. When the righteous receives the reward of a righteous man, and the prophet receives the prophet's reward, then they that suffer with Christ, shall reign with Christ. Rev. vii. 13, 14. What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? These are they which came out of great tribulation.

What is there on this side the grave that can exceedingly distress him, who knows he has so much secure beyond it. If the hopes of descending soon to the silent dust has reconciled many to temporary evils, shall it not give strong consolation to reflect that at death his soul shall pass into the heavenly sanctuary? Isa. xxxv. 10. The ransomed of the Lord shall come to Zion, with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. Can we seriously repine at these troubles which are testimonies
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of our relation to God, and will at length be found the means of treasuring up glory for us? Can we repine that we have not such gifts as the sons of the handmaid obtained, when we know that, like Isaac, we are to have the unfading inheritance? Can we not brieve want, and hard fare, and bad accommodation, when we are going, and the sooner for our distress, to our father's house, where there is enough and to spare? Do not the things of time, be they good or evil, vanish, when compared with eternity? 2 Cor. iv. 17. For our light affliction which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, for which cause we faint not. Rom. viii. 18. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time, are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

PART THIRD.

5. THERE are arguments to contentment drawn from its nature and immediate effects. It comes self-recommended; and these intrinsic motives to the study of it highly deserve our attention.

I. Contentment produces an inward peace and satisfaction, in every condition, even when outward circumstances are hard and unfavourable.

They

They have entertained most unworthy and false conceptions of the precepts of religion, that hold them as the impositions of a hard master, who needs to be supported by levying a heavy tribute upon his subjects. Far from being such exactions, they are the kind counsels of the Supreme independent Being, to whom our goodness cannot extend, enjoining us to do what is necessary to our own happiness. A conscientious discharge of any one duty is found not only productive of good in its remote consequences, but gives in hand some degree of immediate pleasure; and contentment in particular is fruitful, beyond the measure of others: it yields a joy unspeakable, a joy not extorted, and wrung from it by close recollection, but which flows in with it. To be contented is to be happy. The unclean spirit in the gospel parable, walking through dry places, seeking rest and finding none, is the fit emblem of one who wants contentment. Without this, prosperity gives no enjoyment, and is, properly speaking, a heavy burden. There can hardly be imagined a more pitiable object than the person whom providence has loaded with benefits, and who yet retains a fretful spirit. He finds no relish in all he possesses, and possessing so much, knows not what to wish for more. In the fulness of his sufficiency, he is in straits. *Lk. ix. 20.* He shall snatch on the right hand, and be hungry, and he shall eat on the left hand, and shall

shall not be satisfied. Hab. ii. 5. He enlargeth his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied. But let contentment be added to this person's possessions, and then he has all; the enjoyment of himself, and of every thing else which he otherwise possesses in vain. It not only gives happiness where the outward materials of it are provided, but shows its virtue, perhaps more convincingly, by creating a happiness where those are not. All burdens are light where we go quietly under them; every yoke is easy, where there is no reluctance, or struggling with it. Poverty does a man no hurt, where it does not produce dissatisfaction of mind; and adversity is nothing, where it cannot provoke impatience. Grant me contentment, and let the world do its worst; I can sing undisturbed with the prophet Hab. iii. 17, 18. Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines, the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, the flocks shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will joy in the God of my salvation.—If we have carefully considered the opposite conditions of the high and low around, we will conclude, Better is a little with contentment, than great revenues with inward trouble and disquiet. Judg. viii. 2. Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer? The satisfaction arising
from

from outward things must, like them, be precarious ; this, which proceeds from contentment, is permanent : That, coming from without more gross and muddy, the streams resembling the fountain ; this springing up in the mind more refined and pure. Nay this, proceeding from contentment a divine grace, must be divine and excellent : This is heavenly ; the very food of angels ; it is in kind that joy which scripture calls the fruit of the spirit. Our own experience may convince us what a sweetness there is in a contented mind. Who has not had seasons of complacency, when he could say, I have all and abound, when every thing in his lot showed its pleasing side ? May you not remember them as Job did the days of prosperity, and with the same wishful delight ? Job xxix. 2. Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me, when his candle shined upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness ; as I was in the days of my youth, when the secret of God was upon my tabernacle. Return, then, from abroad, from the vain pursuit of a fugitive bliss amongst external things ; seek your felicity at home in contentment. Desist from the chase of it in illicit sinful gratification. Mic. ii. 10. Arise ye and depart, for this is not your rest, because it is polluted ; it shall destroy you, even with a sore destruction. Rather look for it in the exercise of virtue, and the content-

ed enjoyment of what providence bestows. If you are studious of ease and quiet, in this course alone you can obtain it. If you would see good days, and rejoice in them all, here is happiness, the best that this world can give. The voice of contentment, as of wisdom, is, Prov. viii. 32. Now, therefore, hearken unto me, O ye children, for blessed are they that keep my ways.

(2.) The exercise of contentment, composing the mind, fits and disposes it for the service of God and the discharge of every other duty.

The waterpool, when its surface is ruffled with the tempest, receives unfair and distorted images of the objects that surround it: in like manner, unjust and disadvantageous are the ideas of God and the divine government entertained by that mind which is rankled by discontent. Under the power of this malignant principle, we are such as Saul was, when the evil spirit from the Lord was upon him, and our mind is like an instrument out of tune. At intervals we may begin the service of God; but that which burdens our spirits will soon recur to our thoughts, and occupy the soul. Our affections will quickly be diverted from the great object of worship and turned by their own unhappy bias into another channel. The heart cleaving to dust will be found going after covetousness. It is well if it has no worse, consequences than barely to indispose us for the sacred

cred acts of devotion. Has it not betrayed many into gross impieties? Has it not provoked them to murmur, and repine at providence, to set their mouth against heaven, to curse God, and charge him foolishly? And besides this, what evils does it produce to others! From whence come wars and fightings, which desolate cities and depopulate countries, but from the discontents of princes? To what other source can we trace those vile political intrigues which spread corruption and venality, the poison of kingdoms? I am loath to speak of frauds, and murders, and crimes, that should not be named; of horrid executions and untimely deaths, which so often proceed from discontent in the lower stations of life. But here is the praise of contentment, that it obviates these temptations; leaves them nothing to fix upon, no portion in us; soothes the mind into a calm, and begets a composure which fits us for acting our part in life, and for performing the duties of religion. He that is pleased with his own lot, thinks well and justly of an all-ruling providence. He who is satisfied with his present circumstances, can cheerfully trust God with every thing future: He that possesses his soul in patience, can meditate with delight. In prayer, the contented person can lift up holy hands, without wrath and doubting. In thanksgiving or in the holy eucharist, he is a cheerful giver. My heart is fixed, my heart is fixed; I

will sing and give praise. The enlargement of soul which he experiences in duty, moves to frequency in it, and furnishes fresh supplies of alacrity. As the Israelites did, he rejoices, for that he offers willingly. He is in the fittest disposition for obeying the apostolic precept, requiring that habitual glow of piety; rejoice evermore. This view of contentment, as the best antidote against the temptations which are in the world, and an excellent mean of fitting us for the service of God, the chief purpose of our being, must give us an high idea of its importance, and show us how much it concerns us to cultivate it. To struggle against impatience is to lay off that which incumbers the soul in every pious exercise: It is to lay aside the weight which doth so easily beset us, that we may run with patience the race set before us. 1 Tim. vi. 6. Godliness, with contentment, is great gain; and it may be said of the one as well as the other, That it is profitable unto all things, iv. 8.

(3. To be contented is the best way to obtain relief from trouble.

When the mind is undisturbed with anxiety, we are in the best situation for laying hold of, and improving to the utmost those seasons and opportunities that offer for bettering our outward circumstances; and there is something in contentment that may recommend us to the protection and fa-

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your of others.—Or if our condition is such, that there is little to be expected from our own best endeavours, or the friendly aids of those about us, and we must look up unto the rock that is higher than we, then who has the best reason to expect the divine favour? He that is fullen, and out of humour, or he that is well pleased with his lot, and chearfully submits to the will of providence? Here the decision is easy, and we may take it in the words of the man of God unto Eli, 1 Sam. ii. 30. But now the Lord saith, them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.—We are taught by reason and by Scripture that when a man's ways please the Lord he will order every thing for his good; and contentment, as it disposes us for the acceptable service of God, puts us in the way to obtain his favour. I do not say that this, even when it is accompanied with other Christian graces, as it ever is, will ensure to us a course of outward prosperity, or give any certain ground to look for deliverance from every evil; or that, like Job, our fortune will be reversed, and the latter end better than the beginning. Only this much we may justly expect, that providence will either visibly interpose for us, or by a powerful invisible influence, guide the events in which we are concerned for our advantage.—Among other important ends, for which good men are visited with

with the rod, this is the chief, to habituate and inure them to patience and submission. Now where contentment is once learnt, this is attained; and we may humbly presume that he who afflicts not willingly, nor grieves the children of men, who chastens us only for our profit, will not harraßs us with unnecessary severities. Contentment, considered as a divine grace, gives still greater encouragement to hope: it is in this view a pledge of the favour of heaven, and a token for good. I have been the special care and pupil of providence. My master in heaven has tutored me in hardships, to break the stubbornness of my heart; he has taught me this important lesson, to acquiesce in his will; by all this I infer he loves me; and what then may I not expect from his unchangeable affection? Goodness and mercy shall surely follow me all my days, and I will dwell in God's house for evermore.— This exercise interests us in many great and precious promises, which are all yea and amen. Here you might be put in mind of those made to meekness, humility, and patience, which involve contentment, or are the same with it: let me only mention one which is plain and explicit, Heb. xiii. 5. Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have, for he hath said I will never leave thee nor forsake thee. Is there any thing here insidious? are we enticed to
a confidence

a confidence which will fail whenever we lean to it? He is not man that he should change, nor the son of man that he should repent. Faithful is he that hath promised.—And here is the wide difference betwixt the person who is by constitution equal and hardy, and the Christian who has learnt contentment through Christ Jesus who strengtheneth him. They have both in common that inward calm and ease which arises from that happy frame of mind; but besides this, the disciple of Christ has all that accession of heightened enjoyment which flows from a conscious sense of the divine favour, and well grounded gladdening hopes.—Discontent would always have things otherways, and more agreeable than they are; but by provoking God it defeats its own aim: contentment, which leaves all to him, engages his faithfulness and power for us; it gives present quiet and composure, and ensures an happy issue of all.

Thus have I attempted to state the arguments to contentment, and opened up the different sources from whence they may be taken. They seem to have severally their weight: They are various, presenting what, it is to be thought, will touch the different conditions of men: They not only show the obligation of contentment, but, if duly considered and applied, may, through the blessing of God, help us in the attaining of it. I go on now,

III. To

III. To lay down some useful rules to be observed, in order to facilitate this important lesson of Christian morality.

I. Study to have peace with God, and in your own mind, and to secure this by a strict and sincere regard to the divine precepts.

Other rules may be useful; this is absolutely necessary: others may be good; this is fundamental: where this is disregarded, there is an utter incapacity for contentment. It is not indeed to be denied that of the ungodly which prosper in the world, there are some who relish and enjoy what they possess. But this complacency may quickly be disturbed. Now they are not in trouble like other men, nor plagued like other men: but in this uncertain state some sudden unforeseen event may rouse them to a sense of guilt; and then their enjoyment is gone, like a dream when one awakes. Pf. lxxiii. 18. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places.—At variance with themselves, distracted with remorse, and dismayed with fear, every thing displeases.—Heaven lowers above; hell opens its mouth beneath; wrath urges behind; and misery without end meets them in the prospect. In such circumstances there can be little satisfaction expected from the best worldly things: miserable comforters are they all: Guilt produces an impatience and restlessness which nothing outward can allay. There is no peace, faith
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my God, to the wicked. The first step then in the way to solid contentment is to remove this secret spring of misery and wretchedness; and this can only be effected by obeying the gospel.

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. The blood of Jesus cleanses from all sin; repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out. Whoso confesseth and forsaketh his sins shall find mercy. Add unto your faith virtue. Live soberly, righteously, and godly in the world. Hold faith and a good conscience. Grow in grace. Other applications may check the disorder, and give respite; this strikes deep at the cause—As we make progress in the Christian life, all will become clear within; and all without in proportion will put on a fairer aspect. When one is at peace with God through Jesus Christ, and at peace with himself, externals cannot give half so much disquiet—His heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord; he shall not be afraid of evil tidings—There will be something from within to relieve under the occasions of uneasiness from without. Weeping may endure for a night, joy ariseth in the morning. Then only can there be laid a solid foundation for contentment: built upon this rock it will withstand the tempests.

2. Cultivate humility, and mortify the opposite temper.

Our blessed Lord, the infallible teacher of his people, plainly states humility as the foundation of all other virtues. In that list of characters on which he pronounced his blessing, he begins with the poor in spirit; and often assures us in the most solemn manner, that, unless we humble ourselves and become as little children, we cannot enter into the kingdom of God. And there is nothing more obvious from reason, observation, and experience, than that the lowly frame of mind is the foundation of contentment. When we think highly of ourselves, let providence deal ever so kindly by us, we are ready to think its bestowings are still beneath our desert, and receive them with a sort of disdain, as a creditor accepts a partial payment: the more that is conferred upon us, we value ourselves the more: we rise in the estimate of our worth, and in our expectations from others: our pride is only fostered by that which should satisfy us: all is converted into the nourishment of this distemper; and there is no being contented until this evil spirit is cast out. Haman boasted of the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children, and all the things wherein the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king: but his pride, swollen by his prosperity, deprived him of the enjoyment of it. He could not force the obedience of one faithful Jew, nor bruik
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the want of it : and how little is this great man in the circle of his friends, when he shamefully complains, Esth. v. 13. Yet all this availeth me nothing so long as I see Mordecai the Jew, sitting at the king's gate. But, on the other hand, he that is humble will, it is likely, be easily contented : he that knows himself will prize his mercies, if his lot be favourable ; and if it be hard, will think he is well dealt with. See its virtue in the history of Jacob, contrasted with what you have heard of Haman. You find the good patriarch in real distress ; Esau his brother was advancing towards him ; he dreaded his resentment ; his family and substance were prudently divided and separated : he laid his account that at least the one half would be cut off ; and was not without apprehensions for the whole. He feared him, lest he should come and smite himself, and also the mother with the children. In these circumstances of deep distress, observe the reflection of this good man, the greater as well as the happier for his humility. Gen. xxxii. 10. I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth which thou hast shewed unto thy servant, for with my staff I passed over this Jordan ; and now I am become two bands. Let it be our care then to mortify pride, and to learn to think of ourselves soberly as we ought to think. Dote not with any undue fondness on your station, your estate, your

talents, or your labours. Turn away your eyes from beholding whatever nourishes vanity. Meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips. Soberly reflect that all mankind, in the most important respects, are nearly equal. Consider your meanness and mortality, the frailty of your body, the imperfection of your state, and the sin of your soul. One is our master in heaven; let us obey his command, Mat. xi. 29. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

3. Set bounds to your desires of worldly things, and be moderate in your expectations from them.

How many are there, who, especially at the first setting out in life, and before experience has corrected their presumption, look for great things here, and boundless enjoyment. Little do such persons then think, that they are only treasuring up for themselves uneasiness and vexation of spirit. When these children of hope are crossed and thwarted in their views, how great is their discomfiture! Or even when they succeed, they find things infinitely short of what they had imagined, and their chagrin and impatience is not to be described. More than one half of the disquiets which you meet with among the children of men, proceed from this fantastical humour that so generally prevails. If we would act the wise and prudent part, let us not take high aims,

or deceive ourselves by ill grounded and irrational hopes. The thoughts suggested in a former part of this discourse, may reduce our expectations from the world to the just standard. Our own experience after we are tolerably advanced in life, and that of others, to whom the multitude of years have taught wisdom, may be of use to set us right. Let it be soberly considered what it is we deserve, and we shall not think we receive too little. Let it be considered what it is the divine promise encourages us to expect. Matt. vi. 33. Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you;—these things, i. e. what ye may eat, and what ye may drink, and wherewithal ye may be clothed; or food, and raiment. Let us strip the good things of the world, of the false gilding they receive from our own fancy, and reject the estimate put upon them by popular opinion, that, in case they fall to our lot, our success prove not a disappointment. Let us see them as they are. Let us reflect that they are designed for use, rather than enjoyment; to accommodate pilgrims, and not to reward the saints of God; that the world passes away, and the fashion of it; that there is no Elysium here, no such paradise as the fool has dreamt of. If, through the favour of a kind indulgent providence, it fare with us better than we looked for, or we find more comfort than was expected

pected in sublunary things, we have shunned much unnecessary disquiet, which others meet with who run into the opposite extreme, and have erred on the safe side: Nay, we shall be the happier for our cautious error. It is known that blessings when they have not been anticipated, or when they rise beyond our expectations, yield more than a double relish: whereas they, whose desires are enlarged as hell, can never be satisfied; and they who wish and hope for more than they need, or is promised them, provoke divine providence, tempt the Lord their God, and must be miserable. If then, after humility is attained, and we are instructed to think of ourselves soberly, we could also learn to think of the world as we ought to think, contentment would be a much easier lesson.

4. Beware of prying too anxiously into futurity.

A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself. There is an attention to evils at a distance, when from the natural connection or ordinary course of things they are to be expected which is a proper exercise of the mind; and it were happy for us if in this way we were fortified against every possible event. But what I would now caution against, is an unreasonable foreboding of evils, without any good ground, which can have no better effect than to disarm and dishearten the soul. Some are prone to this from constitutional melancholy. They see afar off,

off, and seldom any thing beside what is horrid and ghastly; from such prospects they may not be diverted; and vindicate their own wilfulness as the prophet Jonah did his passion; yea, I do well to be angry even unto death. Such persons are not to be corrected by serious admonitions. We must commend them to the mercy of God, the father of spirits. But there are others, (and for their sake this caveat is given,) who willingly and from choice encourage these evil forebodings. Such are not aware how much they are enemies to themselves, and their own peace. This presaging humour, by being indulged, grows to a degree of extravagance hardly to be conceived; it becomes a real distemper, and scarcely to be remedied. It is at the bottom of much of our discontent and disquiet. Foreknowledge is the attribute of God; and when we proudly and wilfully assume it, can we wonder if it is turned into the instrument of our punishment? If the evils we expect are such as will really come to pass, yet why should we go out so far to meet them in the distant prospect, and torment ourselves before the time? Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. If they are never to happen, which is much oftener the case, why should we vex ourselves in vain? Why lose the comfort of what we may now enjoy, for the fear of that which we shall never suffer, and subject ourselves to imaginary apprehended ills, worse

worse to be endured than any that are real?—The right management of our affairs, the conduct of life, and the care of our precious souls, will afford abundant occasion for all our prudence, without incumbering ourselves with distrustful timid fears, and unnecessarily taking thought for to-morrow. Let us leave our lot to the disposal of that God who has determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of our habitation; and if we will look forward, let it be to objects that are real, death, judgment, and eternity; futurities of such immense importance, that, when they are duly considered, all betwixt us and them must appear too inconsiderable to affect us greatly, and all these dissatisfactions which give such uneasiness, no less ridiculous than the little discontents of peevish children.

5. Often turn your thoughts in serious meditation to the great truths of revelation.

John iii. 16. God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, might not perish, but have everlasting life. Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust. Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly. He was taken up into heaven. He is even at the right hand of God. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. It is he who was ordained

dained of God to be the judge of quick and dead. And unto them who look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation. The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised. Marvel not at this, for the hour is coming in the which all that are in their graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation. These, and the like, are truths revealed to us from heaven: lay open your minds frequently in the most serious manner to receive them: invite them to turn in and sojourn: detain them as long as it is possible: wrestle with them, and let them not go. A proper and fixed attention to them would loosen our attachment to present things, which is the great source of discontent, and give the soul another, a spiritual, turn. These discoveries would carry us above the world, and translate us into other regions. If we are in earnest engaged about these, how small and insignificant must all things here appear?—If we have no interest in Jesus and the blessings of the gospel, or if the matter be dubious, and we cannot discern how it stands, in either case the mind will find other employment than peevish discontent about perishing trifles.—If we know that we are the sons of God, joint heirs with Christ in his kingdom, and have the witness in ourselves, all

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the crosses and vexations of the world will be as nothing, not worthy to be compared unto the exceeding and eternal weight of glory. The gospe would lead to contentment here in the way to future and endless enjoyment — If he who was lifted up can draw you after him, if his religion can engage you to set your affections on the things that are above, the things below will not so exceedingly fret and discompose you. This is the victory that overcometh the world, and can most effectually overcome all discontent, even our faith.

6. Reflect frequently upon the favours of divine providence, and render unto God the praise that is due to his name.

Attend unto the favours God bestows upon you: recollect with care these he has bestowed: remember the signal interpositions of his benign providence, and the days of the right hand of the Most High. Remark every evening what an accession is made to his bounties each day of life, and with what endearing circumstances these largesses of his goodness are enhanced. Offer him your hearty thanksgivings, the only return in your power: praise him with your glory: let your mouth praise him with joyful lips: this is not only in itself an obvious and important duty, but, among other expedients, it will be found of no small avail for allaying the disquiet and impatience of our minds. If there is any ingenuity remaining,

maining, will we not blush to complain of evils that are small and imperceptible, when we see, in the other scale, blessings immense and numberless. So long as we are occupied in thanking God for these, our thoughts are happily turned away from what is disagreeable, and fixed upon the fair and favourable side of our lot. Frequency in this employment wears off every thing harsh and sour, and soothes the mind into an agreeable and pleased frame. We cannot, at one and the same time, be pleased and displeased; no more can we be grateful and discontented. We read of an extraordinary device in the case of Saul, when the evil spirit from the Lord troubled him, and of its wonderful efficacy. 1 Sam. xvi. 23. And it came to pass when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him. Let the praise of God be continually in your mouth; and I doubt not there will be found in this easy delightful expedient a sort of charm that will still our disquiets. This exercise, like the harp of David, will immediately refresh and cheer the soul. Contentment, as has already been observed in commendation of it, disposes and tunes the mind for thanksgiving: and it is also true, and will be found to hold in fact, that this exercise abundantly repays all, and in its turn ministers to contentment.

7. Be frequent and fervent in your prayers to God through Jesus Christ.

Discontent is seen in many instances to take its rise, as has been already noticed, from a settled melancholy either constitutional and natural, or contracted: in this case the most convincing arguments and all kinds of moral persuasion are lost: the light shineth into the darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not: the disorder here cannot be remedied without the hand of him who framed us curiously in the lower parts of the earth; and, besides prayer to God by which we may invoke his aid, there is nothing at all in our power. What our Saviour said of the unclean spirit, which his apostles could not cast out, is applicable here, Matt. xvii. 21. This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting. But besides this, where discontent is not altogether so deeply rooted, where other applications may be made, yet this is always of chief importance, and in no case to be omitted. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Prayer accustoms us to trace every thing up into the will and dispensations of an all-ruling providence, which is a most powerful check to discontent, and keeps at all times before us in its proper light the impiety of a querulous complaining humour. There are many things that provoke our dislike and make us uneasy, which we dare not mention in the presence of God. Now
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prayer will oblige us to separate all these evils that are fantastical and imaginary from those that have a reality, and in this manner we will learn to distinguish and strike them off, which will greatly abridge and lessen the number of our grievances. And not only in this way will prayer contribute to our ease and quiet; but if we are habitual in the exercise of it, we shall soon find ourselves less distracted by these evils that are real. Having cast our cares upon God, they will be less oppressing to ourselves: having unboresomed ourselves to our best friend, we shall find the heart lighter and more at ease.— Many and precious are the promises in scripture made to encourage the prayer of faith. Psal. l. 15. Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me. Luke xi. 13. If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the holy Spirit to them that ask him; a promise much to our purpose, if you consider that the Holy Ghost is the Comforter, and that the fruit of the Spirit is peace: to which let me only add another in our context; Phill. iv. 6, 7. Be careful for nothing; but in every thing, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God: and the peace of God which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. What a so-

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lid foundation is here laid for contentment ! Either we shall be enlarged from distress, or supported under it ; either our trouble shall be removed, or we shall receive such an answer as the apostle did, 2 Cor. xii. 9. My grace is sufficient for thee ;—our burden shall be diminished ; or our strength increased. Omit not then an exercise, upon the efficacy of which you may so reasonably depend. Is. xxvi. 20. Come, my people ; enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee : hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast. Ps. lxi. 2, 3, 4. From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed : lead me to the Rock that is higher than I. For thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy. I will abide in thy tabernacle for ever ; I will trust in the cover of thy wings. lvii. 1. Yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast.

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SERMON XI.

ON A FUTURE JUDGMENT.

ECCL. XII. 9.

Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes : but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.

IT is the privilege of our condition that we can look beyond present objects. We can contrive for what is future, and neglecting an immediate interest, conduct ourselves with a view to what is very remote from us. Sense is ever grasping at what is before it ; but we can forego a present gratification, if this is thought necessary to the securing of what is more valuable hereafter. The light of nature and the clearer light of revelation set before us a vast scene to commence when this fleeting state is over ; a separate state of happiness or misery according to our actions ; a resurrection of the body ; a final judgment, and an endless duration. Here are matters of infinite concern. Reason requires that these things, when they are once made known, should
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be attended to, and that in all we do, a constant regard should be had to these important issues of life. No matter if the eye of the body see them not: The mind can discern them; and in the eye of faith they are immense objects. No matter if between us and them, there be some space of time, which may be shorter than we think, and cannot be long: this will quickly elapse; they shall be present, forever present. Intervening time is nothing: Behold the judge standeth at the door.

Here is an excellent preacher; not an ordinary one, otherwise the ordinary small regard given to such might be paid him; but a king, a royal preacher, one eminent for his riches, but more so for his wisdom, wisdom acquired by experience, and supernatural wisdom conferred by the special favour of God; so that there was none like him in Israel before or after him. This book contains his deep and excellent observations on the vanity of the world; at the same time the public testimony he gave to religion, and to the reality and importance of the great truths of it. Here, as upon many occasions, he addresses himself to the young man; and concerned in a particular manner for his safety, recommends to him the serious and frequent consideration of a future judgment. Rejoice, &c. This is either spoken in the way of permission, agreeably to the sentiments he elsewhere expresses, ch. viii. 15. ix. 7.

or it may be in the way of irony, which is more probable from these expressions, "walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes." If you cannot be dissuaded from sin and folly by the rational consideration of the vanity of this world; and all that is in it, yet let the thoughts of an after state and final judgment restrain you. Take your swing of pleasure: deny not to thine heart whatever it desires, if this can be done, whilst thou thinkest of an hereafter; if these sensual pursuits can give thee pleasure, while thou lookest for a judgment to come. —A future judgment is here stated, not only as an argument to a religious life, to the offices of charity particularly treated of in this chapter; but as somewhat that may well balance the vanities of life, and prevent their effect; as sufficient to check the eagerness of impetuous forward youth, and to supply the want of experience.

That the virtue and power of this great truth may be felt, it must be firmly believed, carefully attended to, and fastened in our hearts, like the nail in the sure place by the master of assemblies. That I may contribute my weak endeavours to procure it that regard which is due from young and old, I propose,

I. To state the evidence we have of a judgment to come. And,

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II. Direct

II. Direct you to the improvement which we ought to make of this important article of our holy faith.

And here we shall take, first, the evidence which may be had from the principles of reason, and the light of nature; and, secondly, the testimony of revelation.

I. The evidence of reason. Now this may serve to prove that God will judge the world; as that signifies in general, that he will call men to account for their actions, and that he will reward good men, and punish the wicked in another world. This is all that reason or the light of nature could ever lead to, and such of mankind as had no other guide, proceeded no farther with their discoveries. Many circumstances, to which we are no strangers, lay to them deep and out of sight. But as to the general truth, reason builds securely upon the following principles.

(1.) Man is an accountable creature, and therefore God, who has made him such, will call him to account.

He is not like the beasts of the earth, or fowls of heaven; but endowed with understanding and a faculty of distinguishing right and wrong. He has a law which prescribes his duty; the same law which God explained to Adam when he walked with him in the garden; to Noah, that preacher of righteousness;

ness; to Abraham from whom he would hide none of his counsels; to Moses, when he was with him forty days in the mount; and to his prophets in long succession. This, in its most important and leading articles, is written upon the heart of every man: and it is in the choice of every man whether he will obey this law or not: He is neither dragged by force nor driven by fatal necessity; but follows the determination of his own mind. As there is nothing wanting in our case which might render us accountable creatures, God certainly may call us to account; and by making and endowing us in this manner, he seems plainly to intimate his purpose of doing so. If he is not indifferent whether intelligent creatures use their reason, liberty, and other gifts in his service, or abuse them to his dishonour, whether they obey or transgress his law, it is to be presumed he will some time reckon with them, and discriminate betwixt the righteous and the wicked. This is so very presumable from the slightest view of our condition and circumstances, that I see not how any person can get clear of the apprehension of a judgment, unless he has had some revelation from God that there will be none. The infidel himself carries about in his own frame such evidence of this, as he cannot invalidate by his foolish reasoning, or his mad derision.

(2.) The divine providence, which now governs the world, makes not an exact distinction betwixt the righteous and wicked: therefore a holy and just God is concerned that this be done hereafter in another life.

There is no doubting of a providence. These rewards that are seen to attend virtue, springing out of itself, and evils connected with vice, and inseparable from it; that order which we see maintained in all the kingdoms of the earth, where justice is administered by a few over many, and one rules millions of willing subjects; the invisible power, discovered in its effects, which is seen to punish where the magistrate dares not or cannot touch, to blast or ruin where his power does not reach, and to take the wicked in his own snare; In fine, the rare, yet striking, interposition of heaven to detect and punish wicked men and wicked nations, as the deluge, the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, the earthquake which swallowed Corah and his company, the plagues of Egypt,—the destruction of Pharaoh, the ejection of the Canaanites when their cup of iniquity was full, the fall of the four successive monarchies:—These and many other things, alike obvious, convince every thinking sober mind of a governing providence. Verily there is a reward for the righteous: Verily there is a God that judgeth on the earth. Now
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under his administration, it were to be expected that virtue, as he loves it, should be rewarded, and vice, which his soul hates, should be punished. But this, though accomplished in some instances, we dare not affirm to be the case in all: This were to lie for God. The contrary has been observed in all ages, and stumbled the minds of good men. There is often one event to the righteous and to the wicked, to him that serveth God and him that serveth him not, to him that sweareth and to him that feareth an oath. The wicked live long, and prosper, and have no bands in their death: the righteous are plagued all day long. Few and evil are the days of their pilgrimage; or if it is prolonged, it is full of sorrows, and their gray hairs are brought with sorrow to the ground. The wicked thrive and spread like the green bay tree: the righteous are oppressed, and persecuted, often for righteousness sake. The rich man was clothed in purple, and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: Lazarus was laid at his gate full of sores, which dogs licked. This is an emblem, a figure of life. Nay, so has the Almighty seen fit to order the present state of things, that without a constant miracle, an exact distribution could not be made.—The righteous and wicked inhabit the same country, are members of the same commonwealth, live in the same city, dwell under the same roof, eat at

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one table, sail in the same ship, fight in the same army. And without a constant miracle can they be separated, and have a different lot?—Can God make the wicked compleatly miserable, while the righteous are bound to minister to them, to sympathize with them, and pray for them—Or can he make the righteous happy, while they feel for the misery of the wicked, and must often share in the afflictions of parents or children? But will it always be as it is now; that the righteous should ever be as the wicked? that be far from thee! As sure as God is righteous and holy, he will at length make a distinction: as sure as he rules the world now, he will judge it. When the present schemes of his wise providence, adapted to this mixed dark state of trial, are finished, he will manifest his justice to the whole world. The tares and wheat, which must grow together now, shall at the end of the world be separated.—God seems to have left many things in his providence unsolved, on purpose to try how far we will rely upon him; and to lead on our minds to the expectation of a judgment. But he that is now ripening the faith and patience of good men, by the trials of a present life, will at length reward them: He that is dealing kindly by sinners, softening their hearts, enticing them, courting, and, by his forbearance, waiting till they repent,

pent, will at length, when they are found incorrigible, arise to punish them.

(3.) A conscience within furnishes another proof of a judgment to come.

The evidence of this arising from our condition here, and taken from the ways of providence, acquires further strength, when we find an inward minister, giving a concurring testimony. There is something which we carry about in our breast, which applauds us when we do well, and disturbs us in our evil courses. This is no prejudice, no impression made by early education; but something we have had as far back as we are able to reflect; something inseparable from human nature: It is the native of every country: It grows up with us in youth, and remains vigorous in old age. It may be resisted; it may be suppressed for a season, and, by habits of sin, seared as with a red hot iron: but it cannot be for ever silenced. It will watch the opportunity to enter a faithful testimony. The kings of the earth, whose ears are locked up against every sound but flattery, must hear its free and plain remonstrances. It overtakes the audacious libertine, when his health is impaired, when distress cometh, or death flares him in the face; and at certain seasons seldom fails, if not to convince the infidel that the doctrine of a judgment is true, at least to confound him with suspicious fear. What is this which sometimes whispers its admonitions

tions in a small still voice, sometimes cries aloud and spares not, which incessantly tells us that for all these God will bring us into judgment? This which bears not the sword in vain, but is a terror to evil doers, and a praise unto them that do well? What can this part of ourselves be but the ordinance of God, the the Former of our bodies, and the Father of our spirits? And if conscience has its being, its power and authority, its commission from him, then the testimony it gives concerning a future judgment is infallible. He has sometimes punished the obstinate by giving them up to strong delusion, and sent lying spirits into the mouths of his prophets for the correction of a gainfaying perverse generation: but the God of truth never did and never can deceive all men, good and bad; nor place a lying spirit in the breast of every man. The gracious Author of our nature has never made his creatures to be frightened and scared with the forebodings of futurities that have no reality. These presages are in some sort divine oracles. Beloved, if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts and knoweth all things: but if our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.

This compleats the evidence of a judgment, which we have from reason. It stands on a solid basis: It is built upon a rock. Hence we find that the belief of it, however corrupted by the weak fancies and
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conjectures of men, has obtained at all times, and in all countries. When the apostle Paul, in his discourse at Athens, Acts xvii. touched at the doctrine of a resurrection, part of his audience was disposed to ridicule it : but a judgment, which he handled more fully, appears to have been no strange doctrine ; and we hear not of their attempting to turn it into derision.

2. I now proceed to consider the testimony of revelation. What we learn from reason prepares us to receive what is supernaturally discovered ; and revelation again confirms the dictates of reason upon this subject, and by the imprimatur of heaven adds to it the utmost possible weight and authority. Revelation does not merely disclose the truth but lays it out clothed with the most important and interesting circumstances. It informs us concerning the Judge, and the awful manner of his coming ; concerning them that shall be judged, and the manner of their appearance : It represents the solemn procedure, and the final issue of all.

The notices of a future judgment, it would appear, were very early communicated. Jude, ver. 14, 15. informs us, that Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them, of all their ungodly deeds which

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they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches, which ungodly sinners have spoken against him. Job, xix. 25. entertained the most lively and encouraging expectations of it; For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. The books of Moses contain no explicit mention of a future judgment: but as the whole of his law was a figure, the temporal sanctions of it may be supposed to point out, as emblems, the rewards and punishments of the last great day. Solomon, in our text, speaks expressly of this matter; and concludes this book with a plain assertion, ch. xii. 14. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil. Daniel, vii. 13. speaks of seeing, in the night visions, one like the Son of man, coming in the clouds of heaven. From many passages in the Psalms and books of the prophets, it appears, that this is one of those truths, in the faith of which, the saints of God, under the Mosaic dispensation, lived and died. But any revelation which they enjoyed was obscure, a light shining in a dark place, compared with the discoveries of following and happier times. Life and immortality are clearly brought to light in the gospel.

What mean these precepts of the gospel, to be content with food and raiment; to set our affection on things above, not on things on this earth; not

to love the world, nor the things of the world; to deny ourselves; to mortify our members; to cut off a right hand; to pluck out a right eye; to be ready to lose life for Christ's sake, or even to lay it down for the brethren? These were unreasonable, without supposing a time of retribution: these proceeding from one who was the greatest friend and lover of mankind, give the most reasonable ground of expectation, even had this never been encouraged by his promises. But Jesus, the great Prophet of God, was most explicit and plain upon this subject. He has enforced these hard duties by plain promises of good things hereafter, and threatened to the disobedient, indignation and wrath. The sanctions of his religion are things unseen and eternal. The leading doctrine of it is a judgment to come, when men shall receive according to their deeds. He taught this, in a way very beautiful and entertaining, in the parables which he delivered. That of the tares, Matt. xiii. 24. which grew up with the wheat till the harvest, when they were separated, the wheat gathered into the garner, and the tares cast into the fire: Now the harvest is the end of the world. That of the man, Matt. xxv. 14. going into a far country to receive a kingdom, who called upon his servants, and delivered unto them his goods; and after a long time returned and reckon-

ed with them. That similar to the other, Luke xix. 12. of the nobleman committing his money to his servants, with whom also he afterwards reckoned. That of the rich man and his steward, whom he called to account; and many others similar to these. In these parables, the veil is thin, not intended to hide, but to give a beauty and weight to the truth; they are appeals to reason for the fitness and equity of a judgment to come; at the same time that they have all the force of plain testimonies concerning it. The disciples who besought their Lord so often to explain them, were surely flow of understanding.

This is a subject on which he did not always speak in parables. The metaphor is often laid aside, and he uses the plainest terms, Mat. xvi. 27. The Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he shall reward every man according to his works. Read that full and circumstantiate intimation of it which he gave to his disciples a little before his death, Mat. xxv. 31, &c.

The apostles, who were commanded to teach all nations, preached this doctrine to every creature. This was the subject of St Paul's discourse at Athens, Acts xvii. 30, 31. He carried about with him the habitual impressions of the truth imprinted in his own breast, 2 Cor. v. 9, 10. and knowing the terrors of the Lord, he laboured to persuade men,

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1 Theff. iv. 16, &c. The apostle, 2 Pet. iii. 7, 10. writing to the scattered churches, speaks very awfully of the same futurity, But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burnt up. The apostle John speaks like one that had witnessed this great transaction, Rev. xx. 12. Would it were often realized to our minds, that without the help of prophetic vision, we might be suitably affected with the circumstances of it—And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books according to their works. This is one of those great truths of religion, which stands established on solid principles of reason, and supported at the same time by the fullest testimony of divine revelation: one of these delivered by Jesus, as he received it from the Father, and taught over the world by his apostles—God also bearing them witness both with signs and wonders, and divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost—Wherefore, Beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace without spot and blameless, 2 Pet. iii. 14.

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Thus I am led, according to the method proposed,

II. To direct you to the proper improvement of this important article of our holy Faith—And in general it must occur to every one,

That this life should be spent in a serious and careful preparation for that great event.

There is no dictate of reason more plain, no oracle of revelation more certain, than this, that we mortals who are now spending our few days on this earth, will hereafter appear before the tribunal of God, and render an account of the deeds done in the body. At the same time what futurity can be so interesting as the distinction then to be made between the righteous and the wicked, and the great issue of this last audit! These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal. What are we projecting now, or what are we doing here, if we be not preparing ourselves for that great decisive period, which will determine not a petty question of temporal concern, but our all as to soul and body for ever? That great day of the Lord will be a terrible day to the unprepared. If we have either the reason of men, or the faith of christians, a diligent preparation for it will be our main business. We see men very careful that they be not surprised by any event of importance to them; and is it a matter of indifference that this day

day come upon us unawares? When God is about to visit the sins of men by any temporal calamity, and signs in heaven or in earth indicate his dire displeasure, the inhabitants of this world tremble before him; they learn righteousness: and are we not alarmed when he tells us, as with the voice of thunder, that he comes quickly to execute a final judgment upon all, and to render unto men according to their deeds? When Jonah, a stranger in Nineveh, entered their streets, crying, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be destroyed,—they believed God, and humbled themselves, high and low, and put away every man the evil that was in his hands: and are we to live like the Sidonians, careless, when God himself by his Son, by his apostles and prophets, and by the voice of conscience, is enunciating the destruction of this world, and of all ungodly men? The men of Nineveh shall arise in judgment against this generation, and condemn us; for they repented at the preaching of Jonas.

A diligent and instant preparation is the only wise expedient we can take to secure present quiet undisturbed by the thoughts of a judgment, and to put us in a state of safety, when we shall stand before the Son of man. Reason and conscience advise this course. Time and all these opportunities are given that we may pursue it. Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing.

Trusting

Trusting that your impressions of the certainty of a future judgment, have determined you, through the grace of God, heartily to engage in the great work of preparing for it; I proceed to suggest some directions for the right performance of that work, which to every man is the most important personal concern.

1. In order to our preparation for a future judgment it is necessary that we maintain a sober and close attention to every thing we do. If daily observation and acquaintance with the world did not convince us, we could not figure half the thoughtlessness and inconsideration which prevail. What numbers do we see, whose life resembles a mere dream? They are introduced early upon the stage, with minds unfurnished: they have been helped to a few thoughts concerning that occupation or calling, if it is necessary they have any, which they are to profess to follow; but other ideas they have none. One frolic catches them after another; the more extravagant it is, the more joyous; their folly prevents all improvement, and hinders them from reaping any benefit either by instruction or experience. Levity of mind and utter dissipation become, through habit, a second nature. Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. One would almost guess they had never heard of an after trial, or a future state; at the most, it appears they

they have heard of it only with the hearing of the ear. There are others whose life resembles a frenzy, as that of the former does a dream. Their passions are the men of their counsels; they direct, they drive them furiously, like the herd of swine into whom the devils were permitted to enter; they become more urgent by indulgence, and reason comes to plead in their defence. In fine, there are other examples still of a cooler and more criminal incogitancy, men who have got into a course of life which they cannot vindicate to their own minds, who have continued in it till it is become agreeable or otherwise necessary, and who are resolved therefore at any rate to keep their thoughts employed abroad, to lull conscience asleep, and to shun whatever is like to disturb its security. By such persons admonitions of this kind are received or rather rejected with dread and aversion.—Art thou come to torment us before the time?

How strange do such characters appear, when we reflect, that for all these things God will bring them into judgment! What men are doing so thoughtlessly and rashly, there is a hand above taking down. The books will be opened, and they shall be judged out of the things that are written in the books. What they never thought of, will come under an awful and public review. That they did not consi-

der of it cannot vindicate their conduct. Dare they offer this defence to him who endowed them with reason, and gave them warnings of a judgment?—Away with this unaccountable rashness and folly, so unsuitable to rational creatures, so ill besitting men who shall be judged. Give the strictest attention to every thing you do; look well to your goings, and ponder the path of your feet. Consider in every step you take, whether in this you may expect the approbation of God. Walk circumspectly, live by a plan, and not at random, a sober and wisely concerted plan. Frequently look back, and calmly recognise what is past. By nightly examination of your life and state, know your own selves, and prepare for that great reckoning, when every man shall give an account of himself unto God. Every wise steward does this much to satisfy his master, and merit his confidence; and will you decline what may entitle you to the happy plaudit of the Great Judge, and the everlasting joy of your heavenly master? Consider, and shew yourselves men.

2. It is further requisite, in the view of a future judgment, that we repent sincerely of all our sins.

A very slight and transient review of our past life will convince us that we are sinners; and if we reflect at all, it must be dreadful to think of appearing in the presence of God, compassed about with
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our iniquities. If thou, O Lord, art strict to mark iniquity, who shall stand? It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Now repentance is the only expedient in our power for escaping the punishment we deserve: this humbling of ourselves bids fairest for appeasing his wrath: the severity exercised upon ourselves prevents the purpose of his judgment. Jonah iii. 9. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? The gospel revelation establishes this as a necessary mean of our salvation; and for the comfort of returning penitents, has declared its efficacy. Hesitate not, then, concerning a duty on which so much depends.—Quarrel not with the difficulties which you may apprehend in the exercise of it. Better condemn yourselves than be condemned with the world: better submit to all that is most severe in mortification and selfdenial, than that soul and body should be cast into hell fire. Venture not even to shift it to a more convenient season, lest death issue his unexpected summons, and prevent your deceitful purpose. Turn you, turn you, for why will you die, O house of Israel? Arise, escape for thy life. As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between thee and death.—You are now going as pannels to stand before God: The great trial is coming on: life and death eternal are before you.

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You carry in a conviction of sins committed against heaven, more than enough to condemn you; and will you decline this mean of safety? Unless ye repent, ye shall all perish. Pleadings are proper before a judge; and I am bound to plead in your behalf, that your sins may be forgiven. But must I plead with criminals and offenders to sue for pardon? Must they be entreated to repent and live? Will you not grasp at what scripture calls repentance unto salvation, and repentance unto life? When the apostle Paul preached repentance in the idolatrous city of Athens, this was his only motive; he rested all here; and shall more be needed in a Christian audience? Acts xvii. 30, 31. Now God commandeth all men every where to repent, because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness.

3. It is also necessary, in order to our being prepared for a judgment to come, that we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

One who seriously thinks of that great futurity, must not only be concerned how his sins, which are only renounced and condemned by his repentance, may be washed away, but also how he shall account to him who is infinitely holy and just, even for his best actions. Our purest devotions have been adulterated with the various follies of a wandering mind; our most liberal charities debased with secret
reluctancy

reluctancy and ostentation; our best virtues mingled and dashed with selfishness. How shall man then be just with God? The gospel, which is all a scheme for another world, besides enjoining repentance, which is the forsaking of our sins, has provided a full propitiation and a perfect righteousness, in the life and death of Jesus in our nature; and has declared that these may be appropriated and made our own by faith. The blood of Jesus cleanseth us from all sin: through his righteousness accounted our's, we are righteous: there is no condemnation to them that are in him: Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved: He that believeth not, is condemned already: God is just, and the justifier of them that believe. This method of saving sinners by a substitution, is no contrivance of reason. Reason cannot clear up to the curious and inquisitive, all the intricacies of it. Hence it is rejected by the wise of this world with scorn and aversion, although they have never been able to find any thing more satisfying which may be put in the place of it.

If we are any how deceived who have joined ourselves to Christ, it will yet be nothing the worse for us at the day of judgment upon account of this. Faith in him never made any one a worse man; it has made thousands better. If the New Testament be true; if what friends and foes for many ages ad-
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mitted as incontestible history, deserve credit; if Jesus did the works there recorded, and rose from the dead; if God bare witness to the first apostles with signs and wonders, and divers miracles: Then our faith is rational, and cannot be in vain. I would appear before the bar of God with the humble faith of the weak sincere Christian, rather than with all the wit of all the apostates from the days of Julian. God save me from trusting in that righteousness which they have gone about to establish: may I rather be found in him, not having my own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith! Let them have the rocks and mountains to fall upon them, and hide them: may I have his righteousness to cover me from the tempest! This foundation of the Lord standeth sure: on this I will pitch my confidence; Resting here, I will lift my head with joy, when the voice of the archangel is heard, and the last trumpet sounds. The end of our faith is the salvation of our soul. Rom. viii. 33, 34. Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died.

4. It is also requisite, if we would be prepared for judgment, that we be diligent and assiduous in the service of God.

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He has prescribed our work for us, and given laws directing how we are to worship him; how to live with one another, and how to govern ourselves. If there is to be an after reckoning, if the purpose of a future judgment is to make an exact distribution, it follows that a strict conformity to the divine laws is the proper preparation for that great inquest. The gospel, which prescribes repentance and faith in Jesus, means not to exclude obedience and the virtues of a good life. These are the fruits of repentance, which we are called to bring forth, if we would escape the wrath that is to come: these are the works of which the apostle speaks, Ja. ii. 18, 20. I will shew thee my faith by my works. Wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead. —The gospel insists upon the virtues of a good life, and will have us to practise them in the view of a judgment, Tit. ii. 11, 12. For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world: looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ. The gospel excludes boasting, and allows no merit in the works of righteousness which we have done; but yet it reserves a place for them; and this is our strict charge which was given to Titus, iii. 8. This is a faithful saying,
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and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works: these things are good and profitable to men. They ripen and prepare men for greater measures of that felicity which is the reward of the righteous. According to our proficiency in goodness now, we are taught to expect that the great Judge will dispense to us hereafter, to a righteous man a righteous man's reward, to a prophet a prophet's reward. In this sense blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, for they rest from their labours, and their works do follow them. Matt. xvi. 27. For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he shall reward every man according to his works. Rom. ii. 6. He will render to every man according to his deeds. 2 Cor. v. 10. Rev. xxii. 12.—Fill up, then, this life of trial well and usefully, with the exercises of pure and undefiled religion, with charities and alms deeds. Let a prevailing sincerity animate all you do, remembering that you are to appear before him who searches the heart, and requires truth in the inward parts. When you pray, enter into your closet; sound no trumpet when you give your alms: When you fast, wash your face, anoint your head: Do all heartily as to him who seeth in secret, and he will reward you openly. Consider present advantages and opportunities, as talents for which you
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are to account: occupy them carefully, till he come; that whether they are one, or two, or five, your Master may receive his own with usury. Unto whom much is given, of him much will be required. The most specious apology will not then vindicate us, if we are now wicked and careless. This will be the confounding answer to all, Matt. vii. 23. I never knew you, depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Who shall rescue the slothful servant, when the awful order is issued, Matt. xxv. 30. Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth? We are chusing for all eternity by the manner of life we now lead; whether it shall be said to us at that great day, Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: Or if we shall hear from the mouth of our Judge a more dreadful doom, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels. Seeing these things shall be so, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness! Let the words of the Preacher, the son of David, king of Jerusalem, be heard, making the improvement of his own doctrine. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter, Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall

bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

5. It is requisite that we cultivate and carry about with us, a deep and abiding impression of a judgment.

What sort of persons are we, when a sermon on this subject, or the immediate hand of God laid suddenly upon us, has awakened conscience, and filled us with apprehensions of that awful event! If we could carry with us through life the same striking views of judgment, these purposes would not so often be left behind us in the church, or on the sick bed, but would be fully prosecuted. We should no longer hear the impieties and blasphemies which so often shock us: That trade of dishonesty and fraud would not be carried on: That lewdness and debauchery, which are our disgrace, would not be practised. Men would live at another rate: they would be heard calling every one upon his God: they would be seen putting away every one the evil of his doings. If then any impressions of this futurity have been made, try to detain them, and do not suffer them to go. Count it not enough that you believe the truth. By frequently considering it, and dwelling upon it, make it present; have it always with you. When you read of it in scripture, or hear of it from the pulpit, receive the word with meekness; lay it up in your heart.

heart. When conscience speaks of it, listen with regard; encourage the frequent admonitions of this bosom friend and counsellor. What if, according to St Jerom's advice, you have some one at hand, or imagine you have one, to call upon you frequently, awake and come to judgment?

The mind possesses a faculty of linking and associating things and ideas together, where there is any analogy or resemblance, real or supposed. Take advantage of this: connect with the things that frequently present themselves, the thoughts of that great futurity. When the master transacts with a servant or factor, let both reflect that they are stewards to the Lord of all the earth, who will shortly come and reckon with them. When the merchant or tradesman reviews his books, let him think that he has more awful accounts on hand, and to him of more lasting importance: let him think of books which shall be opened, when he shall be judged out of the things that are written in the books.—When the husbandman has gathered in the fruits of the earth in his season, let him think of that great harvest, when the reapers of heaven shall put in the sickle, and the wheat and the tares be finally separated.—When we witness a trial in our courts of justice, let us be reminded of a more solemn trial, when they that judge, and they that are judged, shall be impanelled before the bar of God; of that great assize, where

all shall be judged, and all shall receive according to the deeds done in the body.

O ye of younger years, let me especially address this advice unto you: admit into your minds, and retain there, the affecting and constant sense of a Present God, and a future judgment. This is your only and best safeguard. Harken to this counsel, ye who, removed from the authority and inspection of parents, are setting out in life without a guide, and without much experience. The proffers of sin are great, though deceitful. Satan presents before you the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, keeping out of sight its troublous and disastrous scenes; saying, all these will I give you, if you will worship me. All this is permitted for your trial: but be persuaded, think ere you engage in the ways of sin, that you are to account to God for every thing you do, that for all these things, he will bring you into judgment. This, if any thing, will check your impatience, moderate your thirst after the pleasures of sense, and restrain your feet from the paths of destruction. Be not averse to this expedient upon account of the uneasiness which you may suppose to attend the frequent meditations of a judgment. The less that your guilt is, the less this will be. If this uneasiness excite conviction, and lead to repentance, it will issue in joy. Your security and ease cannot prevent a judgment.

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They that live under the apprehensions of a judgment are more careful and circumspect in their conduct, but not more troubled nor less joyful than others.—Reject not the advice, because judgment is imagined to be at a great distance. Say not, Where is the promise of his coming—A thousand years are to him but as yesterday: To us, when past, they will be but as yesterday—The space that intervenes will be thought nothing, when the angel shall utter his voice, and swear by him that liveth for ever, that time shall be no more. But the time of your preparation for judgment is still more inconsiderable; it will end with life. You are young, and think that many years remain, in which you may grow wise, though you now live as you list. But you may never be old, and what is the life of the oldest? It is but a vapour, a shadow, a dream.—My dear and young friends, the hope of another generation, who must take up the praise of God, and serve him when we are silent in the dust;—You are stepping into a world that lies in wickedness. I pray God for you, not that he would take you out of the world, but that he would keep you from the evil: and next, after commending you to the grace of God, who is able to keep you from falling, I would enjoin you to remember these words of Solomon. You may smile perhaps at the advice of parents, and make light of those charges which come
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from the pulpit : But disdain not the counsel of a prince, of a rich prince, of a wise prince, of one who would make you wise by his experience. Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou that for all these things, God will bring thee into judgment.

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SERMON XII.

ON THE UNCERTAINTY OF THE TIME OF JUDGMENT.

2 PET. III. 10.

*But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night;
in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great
noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat;
the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall
be burnt up.*

THESE epistles are directed to the scattered churches of Christ, in order to establish them in the profession and practice of their holy religion. In these times the churches were crushed and dispersed by persecution; or if the Christians had any personal respite, the cause they had espoused enjoyed none. Their faith was attacked by the false reasoning of the philosopher, and abused by the mad derision of the scorner. They surely needed, then especially, to hear much of its certainty and excellence; and to be stirred up, and put in remembrance often, that they might not be soon shaken in their minds. This is the office of our apostle; and who fitter than he

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to undertake it?—He writes with all the clear assurance of one who had witnessed the majesty of Jesus when he was transfigured on the mount, and who had heard with his own ears that voice which came forth from the excellent glory, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I well pleased.”—He teaches and admonishes, and exhorts, with the unfeigned sincerity and honest warmth of one, who knew by particular revelation that he was soon to put off the tabernacle, and to go before the Christians in the hardest part of that duty which he recommended.

In this chapter he is engaged in a very important argument concerning the final judgment of the world. The first Christians had, I know not how, embraced very generally a groundless opinion that this great event was at hand. One year passed after another: things continued as they were; and it appeared they had been mistaken. Here was an advantage which the vain and unbelieving failed not to improve. With an insolence peculiar to infidelity, they laughed at the credulity and weakness of the Christians, and insinuated that they were mistaken concerning a judgment as well as concerning the time of it; and that the looked-for event would never come. The apostle here exposes the sophistry of this reasoning. He puts the Christians in mind that the flood of Noah came upon the old world, when scoffers derided the expectation of it, and so would
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a final judgment. He puts them in mind that this was an event determined by God who seeth not as man seeth, and whose views of time and its successions are very different from our weak computations. He helps them to a solution of what was represented as an unaccountable delay, taken from the long suffering of God. That day, he says, is put at a greater distance than you have fancied, that time may be given for repentance, and mercy may use all its efforts. The text is the conclusion of all: it contains an assertion of the truth which remains unshaken by the cavils of the scoffers; But the day of the Lord will come:—And while it implies the certainty of a future judgment; it declares two circumstances respecting that event—that the time of the general judgment is at the end of the world—and that that time, although fixed in the counsels of heaven, remains to us uncertain.

These two circumstances I shall endeavour briefly to illustrate, and then direct you to the proper improvement of what may occur in the course of this illustration.

The FIRST circumstance which my text declares concerning the general judgment is, that the time fixed for that event is at the end of the world. It is here given as the remarkable character of the day of the Lord, in the which the heavens shall pass a-

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way

way with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burnt up.

God hath given this earth to the successive generations of the sons of men, as the place of their trial. When that is over, and the purposes of providence served, he that made it by his word, will destroy it by the blast of the breath of his mouth. The material world has always been affected by the sins of its inhabitants. How often, since the beginning, has the fruitful land by this cause been turned into a barren desert!—Upon the fall of the first man, it was cursed for his sake, and brought forth briars and thorns: Eden itself became a wilderness. When all flesh had corrupted their ways in the tenth generation, it was overwhelmed with the flood: The windows of heaven were opened, and the fountains of the great deep, and the waters prevailed. One family only, which had escaped the general corruption, escaped also the general calamity. Sin, which has already produced so many desolations, will yet again abound, and wax great, and scripture tells us what from the course of providence it is reasonable to expect, will accomplish the final ruin of the world. These desolations past were not final, because the mercy of God had its expedients in reserve for saving sinners: But the last dispensation is long since opened; it has been carrying on for these 1700 years.

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What remains then after this? No more sacrifice for sin: nothing besides fearful judgment and fiery indignation to devour the adversary. When sin shall prevail in spite of this greatest and last effort, mercy has gone its utmost length: the destruction then to ensue will be final and everlasting: the world that was deluged by the flood will be burnt up with fire; and then the judgment shall take place. Ver. 7. But the heavens and earth which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment. In which day, says the text, the heavens shall pass away with great noise; horrible explosion! the elements shall melt with fervent heat; fire devouring the other elements: or the stars, as the word may be rendered, melting shall drop from their exalted orbits. The earth and the works that are therein shall be burnt; dreadful conflagration! Burnt up! No monument left to tell they had been! No rock or mountain to cover the wicked! Good for them, if the wicked were burnt up too! This great world, one horrid wreck! This vast expanse, one desolate waste, again without form and void! It is then, the New Testament tells us, that the end cometh. In the midst of this combustion, the last trumpet shall sound; the voice of the archangel shall be heard: The Lord shall come with clouds; before him fire wasting; the storms shall compass him about. They that are in their

graves shall arise: They that are alive shall be changed: The books shall be opened: The quick and dead shall be judged: The wicked shall go away into everlasting burning, flames to them never to be extinguished, the smoke of their torment to ascend for ever and ever: But the righteous into life eternal: For them are the new heavens and the new earth.—The end of the world is the evening when the Great Householder shall reckon with the labourers. Matt. xx. The end of the world is the harvest, when the Son of man shall send forth his angels, and gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, as the tares are separated and gathered into bundles to be burnt. Matt. xiii. 41. The end of the world is the time when they shall sever the wicked from among the just, as the good and bad fishes are distinguished, after the net is drawn to shore, ver. 49.

The SECOND circumstance declared in my text is, that the time of the general judgment, although fixed in the counsels of heaven, remains to us uncertain. The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night.

If we say with the apostles, Tell us when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?—the New Testament does not furnish any precise answer to
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the question : It only points at many signal revolutions that are to precede the end of the world.

We are told that the man of sin is to be revealed, the son of perdition, before the end come, 2 Thess. ii. 3, &c. We read of his amazing rise, and succeeding dreadful fall, Rev. xiii. 14. Now there is something in the spiritual usurpation and tyranny of the Romish church that wonderfully corresponds to what scripture has said upon this head. But if we have found out antichrist, if this is he, yet what can be said of his fall? Who is able to tell when the cry shall be heard, that Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and shall arise no more?

We are told likewise that before the end there will be a full conversion of the Jews; and, as some have thought from no very forced interpretation of Scripture, they will be brought back into their own country, and inherit in all its latitude the blessings promised to Abraham. Of this you read, Rom. ii. 25. and in many other passages. And indeed we find this once chosen people in all their wide dispersions, after near two thousand years, still separated from the nations in a manner of which there is no example in the history of mankind : A striking evidence that providence will sometime or other serve its purposes by them, as a nation. But when shall this signal interposition in their favour happen? Where is there any Moses to guide Jacob like a flock,
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and gather their dispersed into one? Where any Joshua to conquer at their head? Has the spirit of God yet on any side lifted up a banner against their enemies? Is there come any deliverer out of Zion, who may turn unrighteousness from Jacob?

Again, upon the back of this, and yet before the end, there is looked for a very prosperous state of the kingdom of Christ, when the receiving of the Jews shall be to the Gentiles life from the dead. The first Christians very generally expected the thousand years reign of Jesus with his saints and martyrs upon earth. But this is to us, after our utmost search, a mystery, hard to be understood; nay for ought we certainly know, it may be all a figure, descriptive of the church in its more advanced state, in the new heavens and new earth, for which we look, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

Further, there is also foretold, and much more clearly, a general corruption to prevail over the face of the earth before the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. Abounding vice, the provoking cause of all the desolations that have been wrought from the beginning of time, shall be the immediate cause and forerunner of the destruction of the world, and the last great day. Read 2 Tim. iii. 1—5, 18. Jude 19. ver. 3. of this chapter, Luke xviii. 18. and many other passages. Who, upon reading these, would not immediately conclude that we

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live in the last days, and that this generation shall not pass till all be fulfilled? But when we examine more coolly, there is nothing in all this certain. We know not exactly what is wanting to fill up the measure of iniquity, or how much the cup can hold. God is longfuffering to us ward, not willing that any should perish.

The prognostics of the day of the Lord so distinctly and in so great numbers mentioned by our Lord, Matt. xxiv. and Mark xiii. might seem to distinguish the period inquired after with much certainty. But all these, as history informs us, were seen before the destruction of Jerusalem; perhaps they were designed only as the forerunners of that event: or if they have a reference to the judgment of the world, yet the same context acquaints us that though they may be signs of his coming to the last generation which shall be found alive, they give us no great light. Where we might expect a full discovery, if any where, we meet with these remarkable words, Mark xiii. 32. But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels that are in heaven; neither the Son, but the Father. Neither the Son; an expression, the import of which we shall not be able fully to comprehend, till we have learnt more concerning the union of the divine and human nature of our Saviour; but mean while we may readily infer from it, that it is not for us to know the times
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and the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power.

The events referred to in these and other places of scripture, when they are come to pass, will throw much light upon them, as is ever the case in things prophetic. Mean time the predictions recited are in great measure sealed unto us. This much is obvious, that one chief design of them was to satisfy the first disciples that the coming of the Lord was not so near as they had without sufficient ground apprehended: but they were never meant to inform either them or us concerning the precise period of it.

Agreeably to all which, the common language of scripture upon this subject is, that the coming of the Lord at the last day will be like the flood in the day of Noah; like the destruction of Sodom; that it will fall upon the inhabitants of the earth like a snare; that it will be unexpected, as the return of one from a far journey; sudden like lightening; and often, as in the text, surprising, like the coming of a thief in the night. The good man knows not whether he will come in the even, or at midnight, or at cock-crowing, or in the morning.

THUS have I searched all scripture. The substance of all we can discover is, that there will be a judgment; that it will take place at the end of the world:

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But further we may not pry. The precise time, the day and hour, are reserved from us. They are reserved from others much farther sighted than we; they are among the secret things which belong unto the Lord. I break off the inquiry in the words of the apostle, 2 Thess. v. 1, 2. But of the times and seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you, for yourselves know perfectly,—and farther no man can perfectly know,—that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.

It may satisfy us that in this search we know that we can go no farther. Instead, therefore, of indulging a fruitless curiosity, let us think soberly of the practical improvement of these things that have fallen in our way in the course of this enquiry.

I shall offer you the particulars here that seem to be of most importance in the following exhortations.

1. Maintain the unshaken faith and persuasion of a judgment to come.

That great futurity is discovered by the light of nature. When Paul reasoned of it before Felix, his arguments were not without their weight: the heathen governour trembled. When he preached it at Athens, it was counted no strange doctrine. Scripture lays it before us with all its interesting circumstances, the day and hour only excepted. Reason and revelation agree here with a perfect consonancy, and with one voice declare, that the day of the

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Lord

Lord will come. Whatever confirms the truth of the gospel, every proof, every adminicle of proof confirms also this, which is the leading doctrine of the New Testament. The resurrection of our blessed Lord, the last and greatest sign given to satisfy mankind of his divine mission, is spoken of, as specially intended to establish this, Acts xvii. 31. Because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.—Why then, after all this, should any thing be heard in opposition to solid reason and the pure doctrine of scripture? Hold fast the profession of your faith without wavering: Be not soon shaken in your minds:

You may perhaps be in danger from scoffers. Such there have been in every age, and they abound in our's: this one mark we bear of the last days mentioned, ver. 3. There shall come, in the last days, scoffers, walking after their own lusts.—The apostle gives a specimen of their reasoning, ver. 4. Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. They did not reflect, (he notices) that the most terrible of the judgments which God had before threatened, were awfully accomplished, and that, when the world least expected them:

them: That though they reasoned from a delay, yet they were no judges of what might properly be reckoned a delay in the schemes of the great Ruler of the world: One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. They did not reflect, that what they misinterpreted as a delay, as slackness, was, in fact, the long-suffering of God, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. The scoffers of these last days inherit the spirit of their fathers, and exceed them in nothing, if it is not in a more daring effrontery and insolence. Their reasoning is a mere repetition of the reasoning of former times, in nothing improved: here they are mere plagiarists: and all that they say is more than answered in these solutions of the apostle, to which they have never ventured to reply.—It is not from their argument I apprehend danger almost to the weakest understanding—but against the influence of their loose and vain conversation and frothy discourse, perhaps the strongest and best established are not altogether safe. It is a fact confirmed by observation and the sad experience of many, that the unhallowed wit of infidelity is infectious. It quickly destroys all good principles, and sheds forth a baleful influence. The most sacred truths, the objects of our faith, become less awful and venerable, when we are accustomed to hear them treated with disregard and derision. Our re-

verence for them is lessened day after day; their weight and influence over us is diminished; and thus we are insensibly ripened for apostacy and atheism. Men have not long parted with their principles, when they are wont to enter into vicious courses. Then sin strengthens the wrong bias, and precipitates them into error. A conscious heart of unbelief in departing from the living God, the wishes of a mind become dissolute, rivet an invincible enmity to the truth, and at length they are hardened against all feeling: a melancholy progress! This and more than can be told, we have to dread from scoffers. Ps. i. 1. Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. Persecution for the truth alarms men, and puts them on their guard. It has ever been seen to provoke a spirit of fortitude and brave resistance. The chief danger has always been from the mirth of the ungodly, of whom we may say in the language of Psalm lv. 21. His words are softer than oil, yet are they drawn swords. The chief danger has been from the sly insinuating arts of them that lie in wait to deceive. Our holy apostle, you see, is most afraid of this. It was the apprehension of danger from this quarter that awakened all the jealousy one may discover here, and the becoming warmth with which he argues. Hence he concludes his reasoning with
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this caution, ver. 17. Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away by the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness.

2. Learn how vain it is to set your hearts upon this world, or the things of it.

There are many evidences of its vanity that have occurred to every one of us in what is past of life. We meet with many things in the gospel which show that one great purpose of this dispensation is to take the heart of the Christian off from the world. But what so striking or so effectual as the view here given of the end of it? You are not, like the scoffers mentioned in the preceding verses, willingly ignorant of this, that it is reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. Is it this which all pant after with such painful anxiety, for which all labour with such indefatigable ardour; which they grasp so eagerly, and are so loath to part with; which alienates them from their God, disaffects them to their duty, for which they renounce their hopes, and sell their very soul? A world reserved to fire! By and by a very little of it will serve you here: the pick and shovel will mark out for you a narrow resting place. This is all the greatest monarch shall one day possess: this is all the portion which the richest alive can at length have of his labour under the sun. When we are summon-

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ed again from the dust, shall we have ought of all these things to return unto? Will Darius return to an empire; or Cræsus to his wealth; or will Augustus tax the whole world any more?—What though you have added house to house and field to field, though Satan has given you all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, the next time you see them they shall be on a blaze: This earth one flaming globe; these heavens a region of fire! What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? He will then be convinced that he has made a wretched bargain. Now may you chuse freely for yourselves; but if the world is taken for your portion, it must be your portion forever. These vanities that are now the joy of your heart, and the desire of your eyes, will be converted into the fuel of those flames in which you shall be tormented day and night forever: the worldly man will fall a sacrifice to his own idol. There is no conveying the things of the world hence, in the literal sense: no depositing them where the flame cannot light on them. At least have pity on thyself: take thy soul off them, that it perish not with them: seek those things which are above where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God: set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth—While they are in your possession, make haste to do all the good you can with them. Feed
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the hungry : Clothe the naked : Entertain the stranger : Relieve the distressed : Minister unto the sick : Console the prisoner : Do and give all heartily as unto the Lord. In this way, and in this way only, may they properly be rescued from the burning : In this way they may be transported to heaven : In this way you may make unto yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, which, when you fail, shall receive you into everlasting habitations. Love not the world neither the things of the world : the world, memorable chiefly as it is the scene of your trial, the mean of your trial, the occasion of your trial : important only as so much depends to you at the last day upon the use and the abuse of it.

3. Let this day of the Lord be frequently present to your mind : often think of it.

It is not because men entertain any doubt concerning it, but because they advert not to it, that it has so little effect as we see. Now there is nothing bids fairer to correct this prevailing inattention than the view we have had of the day of the Lord : —An event exceedingly awful—and yet as to the time of it entirely uncertain—In the which day the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, the elements shall melt with fervent heat ; the earth also, and the works that are therein shall be burnt up. If the description of scripture strikes us, what must it be to witness all this ! To step forth from the

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grave into the midst of a burning world: the earth one horrid volcano: the heavens rolled up in scrolls of fire! No view of any further trial, if this indulgence might be looked for from mercy. All is burnt up; no theatre, no place of trial left. All must go to judgment, and receive their everlasting destiny. A dreadful awakening this to the scoffers, who deride all our admonitions as mere ridiculous outcry, and say, where is the promise of his coming? A dreadful awakening to the secure and wicked, who say our Lord delayeth his coming, and begin to beat their fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken. It must add greatly to the terrors of that day which burneth as an oven, that day of wrath and fiery indignation, to know that the time of it is to us an impenetrable secret. It will come as a thief in the night; for ought we know it is now near at hand; the Judge standeth at the door.—The awfulness and yet uncertainty of this event, are circumstances that give it the fastest hold of all within us. How can one almost turn his thoughts another way? Has pleasure any thing so bewitching; diversion and indolence any thing so enchanting: or business ought so interesting, as to divert our attention from these events? Yet unnatural and unaccountable as it may seem, things that are out of sight, though men know not how small the distance is, are disregarded; their importance

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is lightly esteemed: Things present and visible govern the world; they are pursued, because they are present, and determine all this bustle around us. Judgment is a coming, never the flower for the incogitancy and security of men. Look to the world, to your neighbourhood, and say if it is not ripe for surprize. Take heed ye be not smitten with the prevailing lethargy. Encourage the frequent thoughts of a judgment: Detain them, do not let them go: Do all in your power to have them much present: Hear concerning it, with pleasure, the memorials of the pulpit: Read with attention: Listen to the small still voice of conscience; ever welcome its honest admonitions. Have seasons separated for designed meditation upon this subject. Accustom the remembrance of it to mingle in the grave transactions of business, and the gay scenes of entertainment.—Dread not uneasiness from so awful a subject. They that have made it habitual, are more cautious and circumspect than their neighbours, but not more depressed, nor less joyous or chearful. The pain you are afraid of, brings with it a sovereign cure: It leads to reformation, and this produces health and peace.

4. Instantly prepare for judgment.

Meditation on it is of little avail, if you rest in this; the view you have had of it should lead further. An event so important, so awful, and so

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clearly foretold should be provided for. Life is little enough to be spent in preparation. But the thought of the uncertainty in which we are left as to the time, this above all things should quicken and stimulate us here. On the one hand, there are many things foretold in scripture, that remain still to be accomplished: this would incline us to think that the end shall not be yet. On the other hand, the degeneracy of all the kindreds of the earth appears to be such as may ripen us for final destruction: we bear the striking characters of the last generation: Perilous times are come: Faith is rare, scarcely to be found: There are come scoffers walking after their own lusts: mankind are on all hands secure, and fast asleep. This would lead us to suspect that this generation shall not pass till all be fulfilled.—In this uncertainty as to the time of an event decisive, whether it come sooner or later, of our all as to soul and body for ever,—dare we venture to continue one day in a sinful and careless course? In these pressing circumstances, there is no sense in a delay: we can never have more urgent motives, or a fitter time for preparation. There is no sincerity in a delay, since we can fix on no other time for it, which we can promise upon; it is a mere disingenuous shift, a weak device for imposing upon ourselves, and gaining a little present ease. There is no safety
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in a delay. While we are saying, Peace, peace, sudden destruction may come upon us: while we are mispending time in hopes of enjoying more, the angel may utter his voice, and swear by him that liveth for ever and ever, that time shall be no more. The work of your preparation is too great an undertaking, and has too much depending on it, to be put off to an uncertain time. You are to examine yourselves, to repent of your sins, to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, to add unto your faith virtue, every virtue of a good life, to improve every one his different talents, as a faithful steward, to abound in the work of the Lord—If you delay all this, when shall it be done? May not the midnight cry be heard, The Lord cometh; and how terrible will be surprise to you! No oil in your vessels, and your lamps gone out. Is it time to engage in this, when the heavens and earth are on flames? Will you make your peace with Jesus, when his wrath begins to burn; when he comes in the clouds, fire wasting before him, and the storms devouring. You shall then be able to do no more for your safety, than the inhabitants of the old world, when the windows of heaven were set open, and the fountains of the great deep—No more than the men of Sodom did, after the horrible tempest began, and it rained upon them fire and brimstone out of heaven.

It may be you trust that your Lord will delay his coming for some considerable while, at least till you are gathered to your fathers. This is a very general impression. Men have long presumed upon it; and the very last generation which shall not die, but shall be changed, will be the most confident and secure of any. But this does not mend the matter with you, or make your dilatory measures one whit more reasonable. No man knows whether he shall see to morrow; and therefore it is dangerous to leave the great business of life to it. It is the same to us whether we are surprised by death and hurried down into the grave; or surprised by judgment, and caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Death brings the final list. It finishes the account as to us. As we go out of the world, we shall appear before the bar of Christ, and receive according to the deeds done in the body. The space that may intervene betwixt our death and resurrection, may be long or may be short. This need hardly be mentioned; it is a dark night indeed, in which no man can work. The precise time of death, and the precise time of judgment, are equally a secret to us, and concealed from our knowledge for the same reason. In life we must do for both. When scripture speaks of the uncertainty in which we stand as to the term of our life, it is to engage us to mind in this our day, while it is called to day,
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the things that belong to our peace, and to do with our might whatsoever our hands findeth to do. When it speaks of the uncertainty we are left in as to the time of a future judgment, this is ever applied to the same purpose of persuasion. How many passages to this effect might be quoted. Matt. xxiv. 42, 43, 44, &c. Mat. xiii. 32, 33, &c. 1 Theff. v. 2, &c. Rev. iii. 3. xvi. 15. This is the special improvement of it in our context, ver. 11, 14. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent, that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless.

In a word, by way of conclusion, reflect that you live under the gospel dispensation, in these which near two thousand years ago were called the last days. Look on the world bearing many marks of decay, and which seems in the decline of age. Look on its inhabitants, ripe for destruction. Learn to apprehend and habitually to expect the coming of the Lord. He that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Remember and be persuaded of it, that now is the accepted time, and the day of salvation: to day, therefore, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. Occupy your present uncertain time, and the measures of divine grace now offered you; so that this event, which will fall suddenly on the world, may be no surprise to you, that when your Lord cometh, he may find you prepared. Happy
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are they who shall be counted worthy to stand before the Son of man; who shall be able to lift up their heads with confidence, and not to be ashamed at his appearing; who, when Jesus calls to all the earth, saying, Surely, I come quickly,—shall then be able to reply with his saints that have made a covenant with him,—*Amen*, even so, come, Lord Jesus.

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